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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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Value Perceptions

Vol. 113, No. 4

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Way and the Goal of Morality



Complex Social Structures

HUMAN society is a graded organization. We all know about morality, and we all know about duty, but at the same time we find that in different countries the significance of morality varies greatly. What is regarded as moral in one country may in other be considered perfectly immoral....So it is with duty. The idea of duty varies much among different nations....and yet we know that there must be some universal idea of duty.

Two ways are left open to us—the way of the ignorant, who think that there is only one way to truth and that all the rest are wrong, and the way of the wise, who admit that, according to our mental constitution or the different planes of existence in which we are, duty and morality may vary. The important thing is to know that there are gradations of duty and of morality—that the duty of one state of life, in one set of circumstances, will not and cannot be that of another.... In the Hindu system of morality we find that this fact has been recognized from very ancient times; and in their scriptures and books on ethics different rules are laid down for the different classes of men—the householder, the Sannyasin...and the student.

One of the Causes of Differentiation

According to the Sankhya philosophy, nature is composed of three forces called, in Sanskrit, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These as manifested in the physical world are what we may call equilibrium, activity, and inertness. Tamas is typified as

darkness or inactivity; Rajas is activity, expressed as attraction or repulsion; and Sattva is the equilibrium of the two. In every man there are these three forces....So in all creation—in animals, plants, and men—we find the more or less typical manifestation of all these different forces.

Encourage Everyone in their Struggles

Unity in variety is the plan of creation. However men and women may vary individually, there is unity in the background. The different individual characters and classes of men and women are natural variations in creation. Hence, we ought not to judge them by the same standard or put the same ideal before them. Such a course creates only an unnatural struggle, and the result is that man begins to hate himself and is hindered from becoming religious and good. Our duty is to encourage every one in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the truth.

The Goal of Morality

The only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral....The goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness; every thought, word, or deed that is unselfish takes us towards the goal, and, as such, is called moral.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
Vol 1 • 36,41,55,36,112.

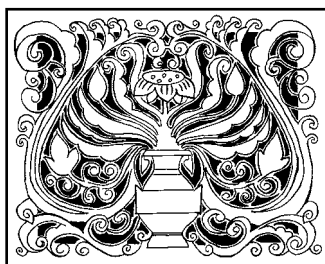


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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Dharma

April 2008
Vol. 113, No. 4

स नैव व्यभवत् तच्छ्रेयोरूपमत्यसृजत धर्मम् तदेतत् क्षत्रस्य क्षत्रं यद्धर्मः
तस्माद्धर्मात्परं नास्ति । अथो अबलीयान् बलीयांसमाशंसते धर्मेण
यथा राज्ञैवम् यो वै स धर्मः सत्यं वै तत् तस्मात् सत्यं वदन्तमाहुः धर्मं
वदतीति धर्मं वा वदन्तं सत्यं वदतीति एतद्धयेवैतदुभयं भवति ॥

Yet he (Brahman) did not flourish. He specially projected that excellent form, dharma (righteousness). This dharma is the controller of the kshatriya. Therefore there is nothing higher than that. (So) even a weak man hopes (to defeat) a stronger man through dharma, as (one contending) with the king. That dharma is verily truth. Therefore they say about a person speaking of truth, 'He speaks of dharma,' or about a person speaking of dharma, 'He speaks of truth,' for both these are but dharma.
(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.14)

धारणाद्धर्म इत्याहुर्धर्मेण विधृताः प्रजाः ।
यत्स्याद्धारणसंयुक्तं स धर्म इति निश्चयः ॥

That which upholds is called dharma; all beings are sustained by dharma. Anything that is capable of holding things together—know it for certain, that is dharma.
(*Mahabharata*, 12.110.11)

न तत्परस्य संदद्यात्प्रतिकूलं यदात्मनः ।
एष संक्षेपतो धर्मः कामादन्यः प्रवर्तते ॥

Do not do to others what is not agreeable to oneself. This, in brief, is dharma; everything else proceeds from desire. (*Mahabharata*, 13.114.8)

मानसं सर्वभूतानां धर्ममाहुर्मनीषिणः ।
तस्मात्सर्वेषु भूतेषु मनसा शिवमाचरेत् ॥

The wise speak of dharma as residing in the minds of all beings. Therefore, let goodwill flow for all beings from the mind.

अजरामरवत्प्राज्ञो विद्यामर्थं च चिन्तयेत् ।
गृहीत इव केशेषु मृत्युना धर्ममाचरेत् ॥

When in search of knowledge or prosperity, think that you would never have death or disease, and when practising dharma, think that death's hand is on your hair.
(*Hitopadesha*, 1.3)

THIS MONTH

Value education, a synonym for **Imbibing Morals**, is a current buzzword, with numerous agencies carrying out research on effective ways of generating awareness of values among children and youth. But the attainment of moral maturity is a complex process. This number tells us why.

Our moral understanding is shaped by numerous personal as well as socio-cultural factors, and even apparently simple acts can generate complex ethical responses. Swami Ishatmanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar, draws attention to this in **Is This Moral?**

Both visual art and the literary narrative have long been used with remarkable effect for highlighting ethical issues. These genres strike an immediate resonance in young hearts and facilitate cognitive and emotional development. They also provide important avenues for personal expression. The 'picture-narrative' method of ethical training is a powerful pedagogic tool that needs to be used more widely in schools. This is the thrust of **The Patachitra Tradition: An Effective Means for Value-based Education** by Swami Sanmatranandaji, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya, Viveknagar.

The transition to professional life from the protected environs of schools and colleges poses complex ethical challenges even as it tests one's knowledge and skills. Success in handling these challenges reflects the efficacy of the ethical training one has received. The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur, has a reputation for imparting good ethical training. Swami Shastrajanandaji, vice principal of the institution, quizzes some of the



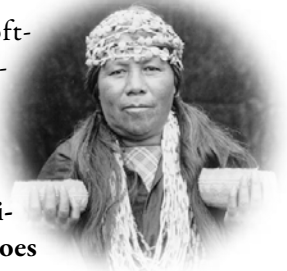
alumni to assess how effectively they have utilized this training. **Vidyamandira Values: Some Reflections** is his report.

The conscientious citizen is confronted with ethical dilemmas with surprising regularity. These can be morally challenging and emotionally taxing. But they also provide important occasions for clarifying our ethical conceptions. A recent youth seminar at the Ramakrishna Math, Pune, focused on some of these practical dilemmas to assess the value perceptions of the youth. Some highlights are presented by the programme coordinators, Sri Dilip Dhovavkar and Sri Prashant Puppall, in **Facing Ethical Dilemmas**.

Swami Sandarshanandaji, Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math, concludes his study of **Buddha in Swami Vivekananda's Eyes** with a review of some of Swamiji's thoughts on the philosophical and social implications of Buddha's teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna had a significant impact on the development of modern Bengali theatre through his influence on the famous playwright and actor Girishchandra Ghosh as well as on many contemporary and later actors and actresses. Swami Chetanandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, provides us a glimpse of this impact in **Sri Ramakrishna: Patron Saint of the Bengali Stage**.

Rajaram Suryanarayan, a software professional from Bangalore, draws our attention to some parallels between Vedic thought and the spiritual ideas of Native Americans in **American Indians and Indians: Echoes across Time**.



EDITORIAL

Imbibing Values

*Sṛṣṭvā purāṇi vividhānyajayātmaśaktyā
vṛkṣān sarīsrpapaśūn khagadamśamatsyān;
Taistairatuṣṭahṛdayaḥ puruṣaṁ vidhāya
brahmāvalokadhiṣaṇaṁ mudamāpa devaḥ.*

Brahman projected this universe—first cosmic, then organic—at various levels of evolution. However, he was not satisfied with all these animals, serpents, fishes, trees, etc. Why? Because he thought that if he were to enter into these bodies, he would not be able to rediscover himself. Therefore, he projected the human form. Having projected the human form, *puruṣaṁ vidhāya*, he was very happy, *mudamāpa devaḥ*, because he thought, in that form he could rediscover himself. That is the uniqueness of the human form.

—Bhagavata, 11.9.28

The Moral Ideal

ANIMALS are known to show goal-oriented behaviour. But these goals are essentially biological—self preservation and species propagation—characterized by *āhāra*, feeding; *nidrā*, sleep; *bhaya*, fear; and *maithuna*, copulation. Humans share these goals with other animals, but they are set apart by their unique capability for abstract thinking and self-reflection. This allows them to recognize themselves as distinct from their bodies and minds, which they can control and direct, as well as to conceive of abstract ideals and realize them in their lives. In the words of the *Aitareya Aranyaka*: ‘Among living beings, it is man alone that says what he has known, that sees what he has known. He knows the future, he knows this world and the next; and he desires to attain the immortal through the mortal. Thus is he endowed, while other creatures are aware of only hunger and thirst.’

It is this capacity for abstraction that has allowed humans to look upon truth, goodness, and beauty—*satya*, *śiva*, and *sundara*—as intrinsic values worthy of pursuit for their own sake. It is this

capacity, again, that has led them beyond the goals of pleasure and utility—*kāma* and *artha*—to the higher goals of *dharma*, righteousness, and *mokṣa*, liberation from all limitations. The discovery of scientific as well as spiritual truths, of cosmic order and universal ethical principles (*ṛta* and *satya*), of beauty as a reflection of the reality underlying and interpenetrating the universe, and of the possibility of attaining unalloyed and indestructible bliss have all followed from the quest for these values.

The Reality about Morals

Interestingly, empirical studies of moral understanding and moral judgment of men and women of various ages have shown that very few people ever attain to the highest level of moral understanding—termed the ‘post-conventional stage’ by the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, the most well-known of researchers on this issue. This highest stage in Kohlberg’s classification involves understanding right action as being guided by ‘self-chosen ethical principles of conscience [universal ethical principles] that are valid for all humanity, regardless of law and social authority’. Even the next (lower) stage of moral understanding—characterized by a ‘social contract orientation’, whereby ‘individuals regard laws and rules as flexible instruments for furthering human purpose’ and obey laws because they are ‘consistent with individual rights and the interests of the majority’—is reached by only a small proportion of the general population.

Most adults function at a level that Kohlberg terms ‘conventional morality’, characterized by the ‘social-order-maintaining orientation’ or the ‘good boy–good girl orientation’. The latter is also termed ‘morality of interpersonal orientation’, wherein people try to be ‘trustworthy, loyal, respectful, helpful, and nice’ so as to gain social approval and main-

tain warm interpersonal relationships. This also involves practising the Golden Rule: Do to others what you would have them do to you. The 'social-order-maintaining orientation' is a stage higher wherein interpersonal relations are not allowed to influence moral choices—laws are considered universally applicable for the sake of maintaining social order.

In contrast to adults, the moral understanding of children and adolescents is largely 'pre-conventional'. In their pre-teen years children have only a limited capacity to imagine or comprehend viewpoints other than their own. They think of rules as inbuilt features of reality handed down from authority figures, and therefore inviolate. The moral status of actions is judged from consequences rather than intentions—an action is bad if it meets with disapproval from authorities or engenders punishment.

As children grow into their teens, adults are no longer seen as unimpeachable authorities. Cognitive development coupled with interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds helps them realize that moral perspectives can vary among individuals and that the intention behind any action is a better indicator of its moral status than the consequences that may ensue.

Working for Moral Maturity

The transition to the abstract understanding of intentions and then to the conventional adult moral understanding characterized by the 'ideal reciprocity' of the Golden Rule is what the average school-teacher is called upon to aid in his or her students. All courses on value education for schoolchildren must needs address this core issue.

Externally enforced moral regulations are clearly detrimental to the development of moral maturity, as are teachers and role models who see morality in clear-cut black and white terms. The discussion on ethical dilemmas faced by Pune youth (see pp. 251–6) clearly highlights the fact that there can hardly be one view on or a single solution to complex ethical issues. Nor can any one person ever hope to apprehend

all possible ethical issues that a complex real-life situation may throw up. Introducing children and youth to a wide range of ideas and opinions through peer discussion on ethically challenging issues—as done by the Pune group—is a potent method of assisting moral maturity and encouraging ethically sound behaviour. Such discussions open up the mind to wider perspectives, help one discover innovative solutions, and foster the realization that cooperation based on empathy, mutuality, negotiation, and personal warmth can help resolve most conflicts. The 'picture-narrative' approach (pp. 238–43) is another powerful method of invoking ethical awareness and fostering maturity of moral thought among children.

It is worth noting that both the above-mentioned methods are non-judgmental and student- or participant-centred. This is in consonance with the vision of education as manifestation of inherent human perfection and the role of the teacher as facilitator in the process of learning, as revealed by Swami Vivekananda.

Does maturity of moral understanding automatically translate into moral behaviour? Research has shown that it does only to a limited extent. Understanding is a cognitive trait, while ethical behaviour is dependent on control of one's instincts and emotions through the mastery of will. This requires practice of ethical discipline—*yama* and *niyama*. The Vidyamandira experience recorded in this number briefly highlights its efficacy.

Children and youth hate being disciplined. But the Vedantic concept of discipline is self-actuated, based on a deeper understanding of one's nature, and productive of powerful results. Interviews with moral exemplars have revealed that 'their most distinguished characteristic is "seamless integration" of moral vision with personal identity'. This squares well with Swami Vivekananda's exhortation: 'Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'



Is This Moral?

Swami Ishatmananda

TODAY a very important topic, “Business Ethics”, will be discussed by Swamiji.’ The principal of a management college was introducing me to the final-year MBA students. He concluded with the remark, ‘Morality has eroded in every sphere of life. Business, commerce, and trade are also affected. Hence, we have invited Swamiji to enlighten us all on business ethics.’

I was about to recite, as is my wont, a Vedic mantra before the talk, when a student stood up and said, ‘Swamiji, please tell us specifically about morality. Something is immoral for somebody but perfectly moral for many others. What is morality? Is it a list of do’s and don’ts?’

‘I shall answer your question by asking you two questions in turn,’ I said. ‘A man killed another person and robbed him of his money—is this moral?’ All the two hundred or so students shouted, ‘No, immoral.’ I asked again, ‘A soldier on a battlefield killed ten enemy soldiers—is this moral?’ Again a thundering reply, ‘Yes, moral.’ The students were all happy, as though they had successfully answered questions in a quiz contest. Then I asked again: ‘Both of them killed: one man robbed and killed only one person, and the other killed ten persons. Both were acts of cruelty. Why, then, did you say killing one person is immoral while killing ten is moral?’ There was perfect silence. It was a conundrum for them, and I was enjoying their predicament. Then a young woman stood up and said, ‘The first person killed to rob, which is immoral; but the second killed to protect his country and to perform his duty, which is moral.’

It seems that a sense of morality has been extant in human society from its very beginnings. When human beings started living together, forming groups and societies, they must have understood

the necessity of a code of conduct. That would have slowly developed into the concept of morality. Many of the moral codes followed by different human societies in different places are found to be similar. Does this reflect the essential sameness of human nature?

Jarawa Values

I have observed wonderful values among the aboriginal peoples of the Andaman Islands. At the time when I was in Andaman, the Jarawa—one of the aboriginal tribes who for many centuries fiercely resisted interference from so-called modern people—had started showing some signs of friendship. Once or twice, while passing through Jarawa-inhabited areas, I saw a few of them from distance. The innocent faces of the children—with bright, intelligent eyes—impelled me to do something for them. I talked with the then Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Sri I P Gupta, a broad-minded administrator, and he appreciated my plan of starting a ‘Jungle School’ for Jarawa children. Before approaching our headquarters at Belur Math for formal approval, I wanted to gather some information and experience. Sri I P Gupta arranged my visit to the Jarawa jungle with the Bush Police. They chose to take me during the time when the men would be out hunting and collecting food.

There were old women, one or two very old men, and children—from toddlers to young teens. At first, they were sceptical about us and hid themselves behind some bushes. We took some very attractive gifts for them—coconuts, ripe bananas, red cloths, and mirrors. The moment they saw the gifts, they came running to me.

A little girl of five or six seemed to take a special fancy for me. Her name—as it sounded to my ear—

was 'Moo', and I called her Black Moon. She first smelled my hand and then took it in her two little hands, rubbing her chubby cheeks with it. An elderly police constable explained that she was trying to tell me that she liked me and wanted to be my friend. She started using my hand as a swing and was having great fun. In the meantime, the policemen started distributing the gifts, and all the children thronged near the jeep. I signed to Black Moon to go and collect her share. She looked at me intently, as if trying to read my lips. Then, suddenly, she ran towards the jeep, touched a few coconuts, bananas, and so on, and came back again to swing. I tried to convince her that if she left her things like that, others might take them away, but she paid no heed to me.

Afterwards I noticed a wonderful thing: any item that a Jarawa child touched would belong to that child. Those who did not get a certain item did not quarrel or try to take away others' goods. Were they not moral?

Same Act, Different Circumstances

An act which is generally considered immoral and unethical may become moral in certain situations, particularly if it is done for the benefit of others. Telling lies is considered immoral. But on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, when Acharya Drona was killing the supporters of the Pandavas by the hundreds, it was Bhagavan Sri Krishna himself who urged the truthful Yudhishtira to tell a lie to stop Drona's fury and save many lives.

A unique incident from the life of Sri Ramakrishna may be mentioned here. Sri Ramakrishna had been ill, and Kaviraj Gangaprasad Sen of Kumartuli, Kolkata, was consulted. He prescribed medicine and asked Sri Ramakrishna to give up water altogether. Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, would give him plenty of milk daily, and gradually increased the quantity without his being aware of it. Sri Ramakrishna would ask, 'How much milk is this?' Holy Mother would artfully dodge the question, giving hazy answers. Afterwards she explained, 'There is no harm in telling a lie for feeding someone. In this way I coax him to eat.'

Swami Ranganathananda, thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order, was once asked whether sadhus tell lies. To the surprise of all, he answered, in his characteristically reserved way, 'Yes.' There was commotion in the auditorium! Revered Maharaj raised his right hand to calm the audience down, and then told the following story: There was a sadhu who was known for his truthfulness. One evening, he was sitting alone by the side of a road when a man came running to him, gasping and panting for air. 'Swamiji, some cruel men are chasing me!' he cried. 'They want to kill me for my money!' The sadhu looked at him but did not break his silence. The man ran off to the left. After a few moments a group of ferocious-looking men, daggers in hand, ran up to the same sadhu and demanded, 'Did you see a man running along this road?' The sadhu nodded his head in affirmation. 'Which way did he go?' they roared. The holy man pointed to the right, and the dacoits ran off in that direction. Swami Ranganathananda then asked the audience, 'In that situation, did the sadhu practise dharma by telling an untruth?' The audience burst into applause.

Though so much has been written on morality—thousands of words have been used to explain it—still, people find the concept difficult to understand and to put into practice.

A Tale of Woe

Once a young woman approached me with a request to admit her son, a boy of hardly six years, in our home for destitute boys. When I enquired about the boy's father, she said that he had left the island. In Andaman, there are many sad cases of family desertion by men who go to other places to try their luck. I admitted the boy in our home, and she left with a promise to visit her son at least once a month.

She kept her promise and visited our home frequently. After a few months she came along with a man of South Indian origin. She asked me to note the name of the man as the father of her son. After a year or so she came with another man, of local origin, and wanted to put *his* name as the father of her son instead of the previous one. I did not say

anything, but from my face perhaps she could understand that I did not like her behaviour.

One afternoon she came alone and wanted to touch my feet. I did not allow her to do so and, perhaps a bit roughly, told her to sit on the veranda. She left my office, sat on the floor of the veranda, and burst into tears. I do not know why, but I did not feel any sympathy for her.

‘I know why you hate me,’ she sobbed. ‘I know a holy man like you can not tolerate a characterless woman. But please allow me to tell you a few words about my life.’ She then related her tale of woe:

‘My mother died just after I was born, and I grew up under the care of my stepmother. My father died when I was ten or eleven years old. We had land to cultivate, but no men to do that. One day when I returned from school, my stepmother told me, “Get ready for marriage.” I saw a Hindi-speaking labourer, three times my age, sitting in the corner of our room. I was forced to marry him. That man was not bad and never misbehaved with me, but my going to school was stopped. After a year or so, he had a fight with my stepmother over the share of grain and left our house. My stepmother allowed me to go to school again; but that again stopped after a

few months, when she found another labourer for her cultivation. I had to obey her order. This man continued for eight years and became the father of my son. Then one morning I learned that he had left. By this time I was mature enough to understand that my stepmother was using me as bait to get a labourer for her land.

‘When for a third time she found a man to work her land, I secretly left home—without knowing where to go. I got on a boat. On board, I met a lady who told me about you and your ashrama. She advised me to leave my son with you and to join a stone factory as a daily labourer. Swamiji, you are a holy man; you know many things—but you do not know the suffering of a woman without moorings. Just for survival I had to marry the first person I could find—he was a driver. And now for the same reason I have taken shelter with this man. But Swamiji, I promise that I will bring an end to my life when my son turns eighteen and is able to look after himself. Believe me, Swamiji.’

Through her sobbing, she asked me a question: ‘Swamiji, am I immoral?’

I could not answer her question. Can you, readers?



The Alternate Viewpoint

Animesh Debnath (class eight) raised his hand and asked us to show the scene once again. The film was *Pather Panchali*, directed by Satyajit Ray, and the scene had Durga peeping into an earthen jar to look at the kitten she had kept there. Ray wanted to show us how Durga appeared to the kitten, and the scene does give the impression of us being in the place of the kitten, looking at Durga’s face through the mouth of the pot. Animesh reviewed the scene several times over, and after being lost in thought for hours reproduced the scene in pencil and water colour. When asked the reason for his interest in this particular episode, he was reluctant to explain. On being pressed, he said, ‘I have drawn the picture, there it ends,’ as if to tell us that every painting has its own language of expression, which need not be translated into words.



In discussing values, it is voices such as Animesh Debnath’s that we need to listen to. Many such voices will be speaking to us in the following pages. If we are to benefit from them, we will have to give them a perceptive ear.

—Swami Sanmatrananda

The Patachitra Tradition: An Effective Means for Value-based Education

Swami Sanmatrananda

THE present approaches to value and moral education in Indian schools are largely dependent on textbooks and certain stereotyped tests administered to students on a monthly or annual basis. This method fails to inspire students, who look upon the subject as an added burden in their already overloaded curricula. Moreover, in this approach, it is often difficult for students to relate their classroom lessons to the life they actually live. It is, therefore, important that we explore fresh and interesting methods of value education to supplement the existing courses. With this purpose in mind, we have tried to introduce—in a modern way—the ancient *Patachitra* art tradition of rural Bengal in our school at Viveknagar, Tripura. This article presents an overview of the method.

Even in recent times, the wandering minstrel with a roll of canvas pieces tucked under his arm was a common sight in the afternoons in the sleepy hamlets of Bengal. These minstrels are called *patuas* or painters, and their canvas paintings *patachitra* or simply *pat*. The paintings usually depict stories from the great epics—Ramayana and Mahabharata—or Puranic legends and popular folk tales. The *patua* acts out the legend he has drawn even as he recites and sings the narrative composed in engaging verse and song. Traditional culture, household values, and contemporary social ideals—all enter spontaneously into the hearts of village children gathered round the *patua* displaying his paintings and dramatic solo performance.

Can we not produce the same effect on the minds of the young students in our schools? We could (i) tell them some story from a noble literary piece, (ii) inspire them to sketch or paint different scenes from the narrative or image the characters

therein, and (iii) ask them to explain their paintings in their own language to an audience—their classmates, or visitors to a painting exhibition. The children could explain their paintings through narrative, action, or song.

This is what we tried to do at the annual painting exhibition of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya at Viveknagar.

We chose Bhibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's celebrated novel *Pather Panchali* ('The Ballad of the Road') for this project. There were several reasons for this choice. First, this novel tells how a village boy, Apu, grows into manhood, overcoming many emotional hurdles—a simple yet subtle story of the transformation of an imaginative rural child into a sensitive youth living in the bewildering complexities of an urban metropolis. It has been found that adolescent students are deeply attracted to this narrative because similar transformations are taking place in their own psyche. Second, the author of this novel has successfully captured the untrammelled beauty of Mother Nature—the richness of flora and fauna, green pastures, murmuring rivulets, rural hutments humming with activity, open skies, and fluid moonlight. These descriptions easily capture the hearts of the students and transport them into the world of creative imagination. Third, the narrative is suggestive of a lofty ideal underpinning mundane life. Life is a never-ending path; it is a continuous movement, through happiness and suffering, through trials and tribulations. A sense of unity, however, survives this sea of change—a sense of connectivity, of oneness of all lives. This unifying thread is closely associated with the perennial flow of noble human aspirations. On reading this story, young readers spontaneously receive an edu-

cation in value-oriented living and, unbeknown to themselves, enter into the current of these noble ideas, becoming *srot-panna*, stream entrants, as it were—to use a Buddhist phrase.



'Nishchindipur', Rituraj Bhoumick, Class 6

Pather Panchali

Let us recall the storyline of the novel in brief. Apu is a village boy and Durga is his elder sister. They live with their parents, Harihar and Sarvajaya, in Nishchindipur, a village on the Ichhamati River. An old aunt, Indir Thakrun, is also part of the family. Harihar is more a man of poetry than of prosaic practical life. But he has to function as a priest to maintain his family. He also travels from village to village explaining the scriptures in the local dialect. Theirs is a poor but simple family.

The bounties of nature—the green fields, clear skies, open paths, and the free-flowing river—touch Apu's sensitive heart and open his eyes to a delightful world. He bonds very well with his sister Durga, and together they run through the meadows to see a train for the first time, to enjoy the first raindrops, to gather mangoes in stormy afternoons, and to execute many such innocent expeditions.

Harihar has to stay away from the family over long periods, and the family suffers dire poverty. To add to their sorrow, Durga falls ill and dies almost untreated on a stormy night. Harihar returns to Nishchindipur, only to receive this heart-breaking news. The family now leaves their village home and moves to Varanasi. Here too their condition doesn't improve. Eventually, Harihar also dies and Sarvajaya has to work as a cook in the house of a rich man to support Apu and herself. The realization of their helplessness slowly dawns on Apu. City life suffocates his imaginative spirit, and he plans to return to the open air of Nishchindipur. But deep within his being, he hears a voice. That voice—the 'presiding deity of life'—exhorts Apu to go forward. The journey of life knows no end, it does not toler-

ate stagnation; cutting across barriers of time and space, it moves on relentlessly. Life changes, but within this dark sea of change, the connectivity of all existence remains aglow.

As we narrated the story to the students of our high school, read out selected passages to them (the book has been translated into English by Tara-pada Chatterjee) and showed them the film based on this story made by the famous director Satyajit Ray—for which he was honoured at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival—we could see their facial expressions change with Apu's changing fortunes; they were living in the dream world of Apu. We encouraged them to translate their inner feelings into drawings, and they responded enthusiastically by reproducing the various episodes of the novel in different media: water colour, pastel, and pencil sketches. An exhibition of this pictorial *Pather Panchali* was organized, and soon the budding artists were busy explaining the story to visitors in animated tones.

What They Felt

At this point we decided to explore whether the values underlying the narrative had been assimilated by the students. This we did by interviewing the artists without disclosing the purpose of these interviews. Given below is a report of some of these interactions.

Rituraj Bhoumick, a student of class six, has painted a village scene from Nishchindipur. His depiction follows the description in the novel, with only a slight variation. Rituraj prefers landscapes. We asked him: 'Why did you choose to draw a landscape instead of narrating the story of the novel?'

Rituraj: To depict the story through painting,

I'd have to bring onto my canvas human beings interacting with each other in closed rooms. I don't like closed rooms. I like open space.

Q: Why? Why do you like open space?

Rituraj: If someone forces me to stay in a closed room, I feel suffocated. But in open space, I'm free!

Q: So, you like freedom! Wonderful! One point that strikes us is that you have drawn a dead tree by the side of a path stretching to the horizon. Why did you put a dead tree at the centre of a village that is so green?

Rituraj: In *Pather Panchali* there are so many deaths. Indir Thakrun, Durga, Harihar ... one after another, they passed away. Apu's story is full of suffering. Yet, he never loses heart. The dead tree in my painting can be compared with these sufferings. In spite of that, the other trees remain full of leaves. The path also cares not for this dead tree. It goes forward. This path itself is like Apu ... full of life ... I mean ... Apu has travelled a lot. From his childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to a more grown-up stage ... from Nishchindipur to Varanasi. I imagine that this path has gone with him to all these places.

A great sense of freedom and the image of life's

*'The Old Aunt',
Koustuv
Roychoudhury,
Class 6*



journey through time and space, in the face of many odds, have clearly inspired this budding artist.

Unlike Rituraj, Koustuv Roychoudhury of class six likes to draw human figures. He is particularly interested in the character of Indir Thakrun, the old aunt who took shelter with Harihar's family.

Q: Why have you chosen the old aunt as the subject of your painting?

Koustuv: For her helplessness, Indir Thakrun draws my sympathy. She has no one of her own. She has nowhere to stay. She finds the shadow of her deceased daughter in Durga. Sarvajaya quarrels with her. She's a burden to Harihar's family. She gets angry and temporarily leaves the house. But she forgets her anger when she meets Durga. In almost all families there are some members who are like Indir, the old aunt. They are helpless. Yet, they fill many gaps in our daily drama. I'm especially attracted to such old men and women. This is why I've chosen the old aunt as the subject of my painting.

'Durga Passes Away', Devajyoti Sengupta, Class 7



It is evident that through this character the novelist has touched a very deep chord in Koustuv's heart.

A painting on Durga's death, done by Devajyoti Sengupta of class seven, attracted our attention next. The painting is clearly influenced by Ray's film. We asked him about the inspiration behind this work.

Q: Why did this particular episode especially attract you?

Devajyoti: When I heard this incident for the first time and then saw the scene in the film, I mean Durga's death, I was deeply touched. It reminded me of the loss of my own sister a year ago. I've tried to present my departed sister in this painting. I found relief when I could express my feelings in this way.

Q: Is there any other reason for your choosing this incident?

Devajyoti: Another reason is the fact that I find the very existence of death to be mysterious. Is there anything after death? Where did Durga go? Where did my little sister go? We don't know. But these questions often come to my mind. That's another reason why I chose this topic.

Q: We see Sarvajaya, Durga's mother, sitting motionless in your painting, as we did in Ray's film ...

Devajyoti: Yes, she appears lifeless ... as if frozen by this terrible shock.

Q: But how can a person come out of this frozen state and start living once again?

Devajyoti: For me, I can only say ... (after some thought) ... I believe in God. Even though there are such terrible losses in life, we shouldn't forget that He is looking after everything.

An earnest endeavour to solve the riddle of death and deep faith in God amidst all sufferings of life were glowing in the eyes of this Nachiketa.

Kaustav Das of class nine has drawn the portraits of Harihar and Sarvajaya—the elderly members of the family. He seems to be less interested in Apu and Durga; he is even reluctant to portray the old aunt Indir Thakrun. Possibly, the old aunt's behaviour is much like that of a child—old age,



'Harihar', Kaustav Das, Class 9

after all, is a 'second infancy' in many ways—and Kaustav apparently is more fascinated by the world of elders. We asked him why he chose to paint the senior members of the family and why he presented Harihar as a man much older than what his age actually is in the novel.

Kaustav: I find that the children—Apu and Durga—are at the focus of this novel. I feel that the novelist has had less scope to concentrate on the elderly characters in his novel. For this reason, I sympathize with the senior members of the family—with Harihar and Sarvajaya in particular. Moreover, I didn't like to depend much on the novelist's portrayals; I wanted to be independent.

Q: And why does Harihar appear so old in your painting?

Kaustav: It is true that in the novel Harihar died in middle age. But I've tried to imagine how he would look if he had lived into old age.

Q: But then you could have drawn the image of any old man ...

Kaustav: That doesn't really matter. I drew my inspiration from Harihar of the novel, but I actually wanted to draw the pathos of any old person.



'Indir', Amlan Mallick, Class 8

Harihar of my painting isn't just Harihar of the novel; he stands for all aged persons of all time.

We appreciated the spirit of independent thinking that Kaustav has shown.

Thus we see that the students who worked to set up this exhibition have been significantly influenced by the ideas and values portrayed in this masterpiece. An indomitable spirit of freedom, the sense of mystery in the face of death, dependence on God, an apprehension of the evanescence of human life, insight into humanity's endless journey, love and respect for elders, a deep feeling for the helpless men and women wending their way through the troubled waters of the world in the afternoon of their lives—the seeds of all these ideas have found a fertile soil in these young hearts.

What about those who did not contribute paintings but attended the exhibition as spectators? We have talked to them too and have obtained similar reactions.

'I've been deeply touched by two of the paintings: "Durga Passes Away" and "Apu Leaves His Village"', says Rajarshi Bhattacharya

of class eight. 'It was Durga who actually taught Apu to look into the beauties of nature. Durga is the very symbol of nature. So, when Durga passed away, I couldn't control my tears. Then Apu left his village. We are reading this novel through Apu's eyes. This little village was Apu's entire world. Thus, when he left the village, it was like his passing away from this world. However, at that time, Apu didn't understand that this passing away was equivalent to entering into a broader world.'

Prasenjit Datta says, 'Apu experienced the irreparable loss of his father, and the transformation that came upon his psyche after that has been well documented towards the end of the exhibition.' 'Durga's premature death after a lot of suffering was quite unbearable for me,' remarks Sayak Debbarma. Sourav Roy points out, 'Following in the footsteps of the film-maker, Amlan Mallick has drawn a picture where the old aunt is found unable to pass a thread through the eye of a needle due to her poor eyesight. The helplessness of the old woman has left an indelible mark on my mind.' Chirantan Das remarks thoughtfully, 'We find "eternal motherhood" expressed in the character of Sarvajaya, as portrayed in this exhibition as well as in the novel.' Sagnik Bhattacharya says, 'Above all, Harihar's poetic simplicity attracts me the most.' All of them are students of class seven.


'One thing is certain,' observes Sri Gopikananda

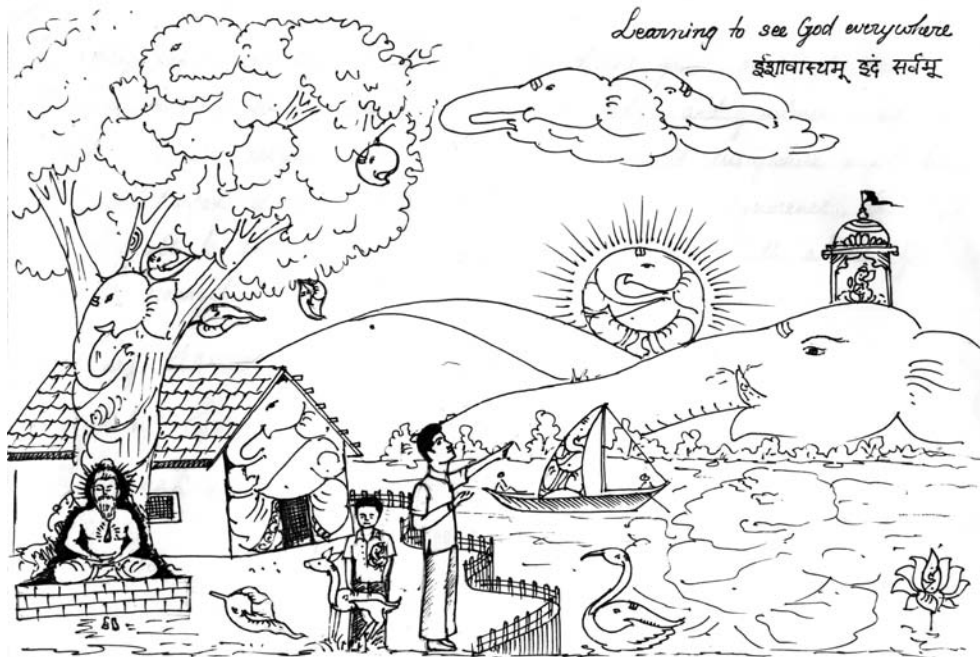
'Apu Leaves His Village', Anubhav Chakravarty, Class 6



Chattopadhyay, the students' art teacher, 'The noble values which enter into the hearts of these children through this method will become permanent assets in their lives. They will never forget this experience.'

In the light of our findings, there is sufficient

justification to believe that this 'picture-narrative' method is remarkably effective in helping students imbibe important values on their own. It may, therefore, be used in conjunction with existing textbook-based approaches to impart value-based education more effectively to school students. 



God can be found everywhere if we just open our eyes and look around. Even within us.

PURPOSE OF RELIGION

The purpose of religion has always baffled youngsters. Since time immemorial children have always been taught to worship only in temples, churches, and mosques. As we grew older our minds started popping up questions like:

What is the purpose of worship in temples, churches, and mosques?

Why should religion confine us to worshipping in places of worship?

The purpose of religion is to experience God within us. The great sages and rishis who have experienced this truth within themselves are said to have preached that the Lord is omnipresent and omnipotent. We must hence go beyond temples, churches, and mosques and find and see God in every object, animate or in-

animate; perhaps, in the way we see atoms in every particle of matter. But how to achieve this seemingly impossible goal is a matter of perseverant practice and self-introspection, to purify the mind and go through all obstacles. The question then arises as to how to really experience this truth. Is it by divine grace or self-effort alone, or by both? This riddle must be resolved and right knowledge and guidance must be invoked by all religions of the world. Seeing God everywhere must be the real purpose of all religions. No religion must force ignorance, though it is difficult to experience and visualize the subtle unseen truth about God by us youngsters.

—Art by Manjunath M; Script by Gaurang R Makam
Class Ten, Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya, Mysore

Vidyamandira Values: Some Reflections

Swami Shastrajnananda

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math

FOUNDED in 1941, the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira was started as an initial step in the march towards the fulfilment of Swami Vivekananda's dream that 'a university should grow at the Belur Math, having religion as its pivot and combining oriental with occidental learning'. The Vidyamandira is a fully residential degree college for boys affiliated to the University of Calcutta and is modelled on the ancient *gurukula* system. Reputed as a premiere institute of higher learning—it has been accredited with an 'A+' grade by the National Accreditation and Assessment Council—it presently offers eleven undergraduate and two postgraduate courses.

The Vidyamandira is located close to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur, amid peaceful and elevating surroundings, free from the din and bustle of busy city life. In this residential college, students interact closely with their teachers, who try to impart all-round training in an atmosphere of serene peace, discipline, and moral purity. The aim is to help students develop into worthy citizens of the country with a sense of genuine pride in its hoary cultural traditions.

Recently we explored the thoughts of some of our alumni about the values they imbibed at Vidyamandira and their experiences in post-Vidyamandira life vis-à-vis their value systems. We put them seven questions (see box on p. 245), obtained their writ-

ten responses to these, and then held informal discussions with them to clarify our understanding of their thoughts. We present here the responses of some of these alumni. The sample is small and the responses cannot be taken as representative of the entire body of Vidyamandira alumni. But they do offer interesting insights into the value system of this institution and its impact on its students.

Five of our respondents are pursuing medical courses and two engineering. We also have responses from a software professional and an English-language lecturer.

1. What are the values that you imbibed at Vidyamandira?

Abhijit: Besides emphasizing such values as punctuality, hard work, and self-realization, the most pertinent stress was on one's becoming a good human being. All of these have slowly helped me develop my humanity. In today's fast-paced society, it is often difficult to distinguish the good from the bad, though security and development are important indicators of social health. The ethical dilemmas that we often face in society cause me much pain; but I also know that this pain is a sure indicator that I am on the right track. This awareness is a gift from Vidyamandira.

Kamakhya: Vidyamandira has taught me the virtues of an ideal student, especially the need for honesty. I have gained immense mental power as a result of my stay at Vidyamandira; this has enabled

me to face all odds.

Krishnendu: When I joined Vidyamandira, I hardly knew how to communicate with people around me. This was partly due to the conservative environment at home and partly because of my own self-centred attitude. So, the attitudinal changes I underwent in my years at Vidyamandira can all be credited to the institution. The central value, in my view, is captured in Swami Vivekananda's exhortation: 'Be good and do good'. All other values—self-help, truthfulness, purity, patience, obedience, discipline, and the like—are but echoes of this cardinal note.

Partha: Vidyamandira has helped me inculcate such qualities as a disciplined life, concentration, honesty, and the ability to take right decisions at the right moment.

Pratik: I believe that most of the values I hold have been shaped by the thoughts and views of my parents. But Vidyamandira has acted as an important catalyst in this shaping process. It has especially helped me with self-actualization, self-control, coping with anxiety and stress, and developing self-esteem and perseverance.

Sourav: My stay at Vidyamandira is an important milestone in my life, as that was the first time I was away from home and on my own. It is here that I learnt that if one remains good and does good things, the result will always be good. It also taught me the necessity of a routine-bound life.

Abhisek: The thousand things that Vidyamandira put forth before us, either as instructions or as lifestyle requirements, could all be termed values. But for an instruction or thought to become a value it must be consciously put to the test of practice. The values that I have learnt to consciously follow include (i) never compromising with whatever one feels to be wrong; (ii) being strong but flexible, whatever be the situation; (iii) being fearless; (iv) being always hungry to learn more; (v) making sure life makes personal sense; (vi) knowing that a well-regulated life brings one happiness beyond one's imagination; (vii) getting to love trouble, as it never leaves you.

Kaushik: When I first came to Vidyamandira, I was a fearful village boy, unfamiliar with the world—both sweet and violent—that lay beyond our green and cool village environs. At Vidyamandira, I got introduced to a larger world. I learnt that there are some wonderful similarities between the various branches of science and spirituality; that all research is a quest for a deeper understanding of creation, and through this, a discovery of the Creator; and that in serving humans we serve God. These ideas fascinated me. The Vidyamandira discipline and routine initially appeared to be too challenging; I even thought of dropping out, but soon realized that this was not very different from the routine and discipline one has at home.

Asis: The most important thing that Vidyamandira did was to teach me the need for having proper values and the importance of sticking to them. We learnt that our lives depend on choices, and that we must make the right ones with a clean conscience. Also, it is here that we became 'social animals' in the real sense of the term, having stayed with a whole lot of fellow students in the hostels. This challenge would become unbearable at times, but we kept learning.

The Values Questionnaire

1. What are the values that you imbibed at Vidyamandira?
2. To what extent have you been able to practise these values in your post-Vidyamandira life?
3. Please describe some incidents in which you were able to act in accordance with these values.
4. Do you think you have a distinctive identity at your workplace?
5. Please describe some incidents in which you were not able to act in accordance with your values.
6. Have you had any problems adjusting to post-Vidyamandira life?
7. What influence has Vidyamandira exerted on your functioning as an ideal citizen of India?

2. To what extent have you been able to practise these values in your post-Vidyamandira life?

Partha: There is, no doubt, a huge difference between life in Vidyamandira and in the world outside. But I have been sincerely trying to apply the values picked up at Vidyamandira to tackle the problems I face, and I believe that, to some extent, I have been successful in doing so.

Abhijit: I have learnt from Vidyamandira that society has helped me become what I am and so I must try to repay this debt in equal measure through selfless service.

Kamakhya: I have joined a 'study circle' based on Swami Vivekananda's ideals at my institute. The spiritual training at Vidyamandira helps me refrain from dishonest ways.

Krishnendu: It is very difficult, no doubt, to practise these values in the college environment that I am presently in. There are obvious failures. But, I believe these failures are evidence that there is something called 'success'. All I have to do is to try harder, and I am determined to do so. This self-determination is one of the values I imbibed at Vidyamandira.

Pratik: At least to a small extent.

Sourav: It is not easy to stick to one's values. I have tried to do so despite lapses.

Abhisek: I don't know to what extent I have been able to put them into practice, but I do remain aware about the need for values in different situations and try to practise them—not to remain a 'good boy' at the end of the day, but to make sure that I find myself clean.

Asis: To every possible extent, in public as well as private life. It has been three years since I parted from my Alma Mater, but the things I learnt there—in both easy and hard ways—will remain with me for life.

3. Please describe some incidents in which you were able to act in accordance with these values.

Abhijit: At my university, the practice of copying answers from papers during tests is rampant; scoring high marks seems to be the sole aim for students. But at Vidyamandira I learnt that even talk-

ing casually with one's neighbour during exams is as good as cheating. So, even when I am ill-prepared, and even when there is ample opportunity to copy, I have been unable to use devious means to get a better score. I have been ridiculed, but I have the mental satisfaction of remaining true and just.

Kamakhya: I do not like smoking. But most students in my hostel are smokers. Some of them have tried to coerce me into smoking on several occasions, but I have always been able to resist such attempts successfully. This moral courage, I believe, I have gained from Vidyamandira. From Vidyamandira I have also learnt to render service to the needy. Our study circle provides me with such an opportunity. The poor boys of the neighbourhood often come to our study circle, and I teach them.

Krishnendu: Let me cite two examples: (i) In our medical college hostel a picnic is organized every year by the second-year students. A majority of the students in our hostel are smokers. They found it difficult to restrain themselves from smoking in the bus on the way to the picnic spot. Non-smokers, including myself, who happened to be in the minority, clearly had a hard time. The next year, I was elected to the organizing committee; and I arranged for a separate bus for non-smokers, even though they were small in number. (ii) One Saraswati Puja night, a friend of mine came to me shivering and sweating. He had been out partying with friends and had taken an intoxicant, *siddhi*, though he was not used to it. He had reacted badly to the drug, but his friends were too intoxicated to take notice of him. I put him to bed and, at his request, stayed with him the whole night, monitoring his condition till he recovered.

Sourav: Taking help from your neighbour during exams is something we never did at Vidyamandira. I have been able to hold on to this habit even in situations where many others are doing so, and despite great temptation to do so.

Partha: Once I took a mathematics book from my teacher and, while going through it, found the question paper of the ensuing class test kept in it. Although I could have looked at the questions, I

did not do so and left the paper where it was.

Abhisek: I have seen people quarrel over trivial things; this is common in our trains and buses. One is apt to avoid such quarrels and pass by. But if one stops for a second, one might find a poor fellow being bullied by a large crowd for some minor mistake. If one can stand by him at that moment and save him from a beating, one feels good. This has happened with me—and I feel it requires much courage to stand up to a crowd. Such courage can only be derived from the values one holds dear.

Pratik: These values help me regularly cope with the day-to-day stresses of life.

Asis: After completing my BA from Vidyamandira in 2005, I joined Jadavpur University. Somewhere, deep inside, I firmly believe that those two years at Jadavpur would not have been so blissful had I not had some very strong values, ethics, and practical experiences—all gathered during my three years' stay at Vidyamandira—to guide me all the way through. Jadavpur University taught me to be myself, and Vidyamandira reminded me how I must be. The rest of the journey was a cakewalk. Since I am to cite some incidents, let me begin with the one that comes to mind immediately. On the second day at the Jadavpur campus, a girl from my batch asked me for a lighter, for obvious reasons. I will never forget the expression on her face when I said, 'I don't have one because I don't smoke.' It was funny, deeply disturbing, and insulting. I felt challenged and belittled. For a moment I thought I would take up smoking. The atmosphere in the corridors encouraged and affirmed such behaviour. But then I came back to my senses within seconds. Just because someone else was doing it didn't mean that I would have to do it too! I would do it only if I felt like doing so.

More often than not, we take our parents for granted. I remember with shame a time when a gulf existed between my father and me. Everything he said or advised seemed inappropriate to me. This caused both of us a lot of worry. Here again, Vidyamandira helped me counsel myself. At college or in the hostel we would often receive scoldings or

be punished for the wrong reasons. This was not an infrequent occurrence, due to some reason or the other. But we were expected to bear with it, and we slowly learnt to do so. Now, whenever my father says something that does not make any sense to me, I just think over what I would have done in a similar situation at Vidyamandira. And there is never any bitterness in the relationship. Sometimes one feels very bad, and even stupid, to take everything head-down, but the biggest consideration at such times is that the person speaking to me is my father. Maybe he is wrong in saying one thing, but he is right in all others ...

4. Do you think you have a distinctive identity at your workplace?

Pratik: Yes, I do. The reasons for this are my perseverance and self-control.

Abhijit: After passing from Vidyamandira, I got admitted to a reputed university. But the lifestyle of students here is very different from that at Vidyamandira. The one aim of students here seems to be to project a polished image; everything—from dress to interpersonal dealings—seems to have that one aim. The temptation for luxury and elitism is strong. But the inner strength that I gained while staying at Vidyamandira seems to act like a strong shield and prevents me from falling in line with the general trend. I clearly feel that this distinguishes me from others.

Kamakhya: All my friends love and respect me. I feel this is due to my moral strength and boldness of character.

Krishnendu: Certainly, I believe that I have a distinctive identity in my hostel and at college. I am never swayed by external provocations and try to keep my own counsel. But if anyone seeks any help from me—be he or she a senior or junior—and if I feel that it is within my ability, I try to do my best to help. I have felt that I am appreciated for this.

Sourav: I don't know if I have a distinct identity, but I try to do all work with care and full attention.

Asis: I have a very distinctive identity at the places where I work. I am a teacher and have learnt a

lot from my teachers, both at the Ramakrishna Mission and at Jadavpur University. Every day, when I teach, I think about the approaches that a few of my teachers might have taken for a particular chapter or exercise. And I really love my students. That is most important. I sincerely believe that just like doctors, teachers too give people life, though in a more complicated sense and form. My students are my friends; I am what they will surely be tomorrow. I keep reminding myself that every day I deal with potential leaders, *littérateurs*, historians, professors, and so on. So I feel all the more responsible, and sometimes nervous. And there is something that I find lacking in teachers of the present day. They only teach; it's really unfortunate. I feel that a teacher must understand that a student's personal problems hamper his or her progress in the academic field. And if teachers are not friendly with their students, they will never get to the root of the students' problems, and hence their ultimate purpose will be defeated. When I accept the responsibility of a student or a batch, I don't think about just their mark-sheets. If they do something wrong, I feel ashamed and responsible. So I try to instil values and ethics in them; and this is impossible unless they accept me as a friend. And to be a friend, I have to stop being just a teacher.

Abhisek: I think I do have a distinct identity among those who understand my background and my work. But this doesn't matter much to me. What does matter is that my senior manager trusts my analysis and my method of argument to such an extent that he grants me full freedom to handle my work the way I wish to.

Partha: Vidyamandira has taught me to aspire for higher personal standards. So, even though I am presently studying in a good engineering college, I have also been working hard to secure admission to more reputed institutions. I think this sets me apart from my fellow students.

5. Please describe some incidents in which you were not able to act in accordance with your values.

Abhijit: While I was studying at the university, two students used to come to me for private tuition. One of them was very poor. I did not take

any remuneration from him. But even then he was irregular as he had to help his father earn a living for the family. Although I came to know about his problems, I did not bother to help him in any other way. I could not have personally given him financial help, but I could definitely have provided him moral and mental support. Even some way for financial assistance could have been worked out if I had applied myself to it. But I remained aloof, and I regret having done so.

Kamakhya: Once in our hostel there was a big political agitation which resulted in a bitter clash between two rival groups. One group forced us to support them. Many apolitical students like me had no other way but to follow their order.

Partha: Once, owing to lack of time due to illness, I filed my laboratory report by simply copying from the report of a previous-year's student. I think this is the sole instance in which I deviated from truth.

Abhisek: I felt bad the day I was ragged by my seniors at college. I was made to sing and dance and read out from a list against my wish. But then I did not feel a strong urge to protest and thought that it is better to be reasonable than to be too rigid with one's principles.

Asis: I believe there is always a second or third approach to dealing with any problem. And those other approaches are also a part of what we learn at college. Everything is, so to say, 'in the syllabus' here.

6. Have you had any problems adjusting to post-Vidyamandira life?

Pratik: Yes, I have. These included (i) an initial uneasiness in getting along with girls in class; (ii) feeling slightly overwhelmed by unrestricted exposure to a larger world; and (iii) facing a dilemma about how to respond diplomatically to the demands of a politically oriented society.

Partha: Ragging posed a real problem in my post-Vidyamandira life. But I managed to handle it. The routine of regular prayers—morning and evening—at Vidyamandira, which I found particularly tough, helped me at this time. It helped me

become more patient and tolerant.

Abhijit: Life at Vidyamandira was well-balanced and well-regulated. Activity was balanced by serenity, strictness and punctuality were moderated with love and affection. But on leaving Vidyamandira I was faced with a world full of greed and selfishness, marked by unimaginable wastage of life's energies and resources. I would often feel angry, but soon I realized that these are the very circumstances that one has to face and overcome; one cannot turn away from them, even as one cannot become a party to this state of affairs.

Kamakhya: The atmosphere in the institution where I presently study can hardly be compared to that at Vidyamandira. Students here are more prone to moral corruption, and the teacher-student relationship is far from healthy. This causes me much difficulty and I also feel sorry for this state of affairs.

Krishnendu: There are several issues that I find problematic: (i) the fast-paced life that hampers thoughtfulness, allowing only the satisfaction of momentary pleasures; (ii) the never-ending appetite for recreation and luxury among my friends; (iii) students' political movements in which principles and honesty are sacrificed to fulfil personal desires and seek personal revenge.

Sourav: Yes, I had problems trying to adapt myself to the totally different lifestyle in the medical college hostel where I stayed. Absence of a common routine and prayers, and the lack of supervision caused real problems. But Vidyamandira has also taught me to adapt myself to whatever situation I might find myself in. This helped me.

Abhisek: I have never had to go through any situation where I had to make compromises or to feel that my conscience was being damaged. But one does have to make numerous adjustments that can be considered trifling in terms of moral consequences.

Kaushik: The atmosphere at the medical college hostel that I joined after passing out of Vidyamandira was an eye-opener for me. The whole atmosphere was 'professional'—students here seemed

to be leading rather mechanical, self-centred lives. There was plenty of show but little discipline. Life in a metropolis like Kolkata can be attractive, but the city can also be hard on those who fail to keep pace with it or who happen to fall. This I find particularly difficult to digest.

Asis: Yes, there were initially some glitches in the post-Vidyamandira phase of my life. They aren't serious enough to be dealt with or analysed here. For example, since the Vidyamandira rules prohibit students from going off-campus frequently, it became a little difficult initially to adjust to the ways of the world in the post-Vidyamandira phase. Also, students from the outside world have a peculiarly distorted view of and opinion about students from the Ramakrishna Mission. That makes it difficult to get accepted by and introduced to the groups that form among students in the first month of the term at every college and university. I have no idea why, but they seem to think that students from the Ramakrishna Mission are (i) definitely the nerdy, studious type who don't know anything about the outer world, and (ii) perhaps, homosexual. This I found utterly ridiculous. Besides, due to limited exposure to the outer world, I found myself lacking in the latest information about films, theatre, music, and so on. It was very difficult to contribute to intelligent discussions, and sitting like a fool doesn't do one's self-confidence and ego a world of good.

7. What influence has Vidyamandira exerted on your functioning as an ideal citizen of India?

Partha: I believe that the values imparted at Vidyamandira are eminently suited to making good citizens of its students. But individuals have to put these into practice, and it is the social environment that puts these values to the test. The post-Vidyamandira life has given me the chance to test my ability to apply these teachings in difficult practical situations. But only time will tell if I have been able to truly fulfil Vidyamandira's mandate.

Abhijit: Vidyamandira has taught me the great message given by Swami Vivekananda: 'This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more

dead than alive.' If I am able to function as an ideal citizen of my country, it would be an indication that Vidyamandira is a living entity, continuously inspiring its students in their walk through the complex avenues of life.

Kamakhya: Vidyamandira has taught me how to remain steady amidst all ups and downs. It has given me an education based on spirituality and taught me to sacrifice self-interest and engage in social welfare.

Krishnendu: As my friends regard me as a good friend, my juniors see me as a good senior, and seniors find in me a good junior, I think I will be able to prove myself a fair, if not good, citizen in the future. The credit for imparting noble values to me goes to Vidyamandira.

Pratik: By helping me develop responsibility, honesty, punctuality, and discipline, Vidyamandira has influenced my functioning as an ideal Indian citizen.

Sourav: Vidyamandira has encouraged me to be a good citizen. That's why I work hard and dream of being a good doctor, a good human being, and an ideal citizen.

Kaushik: There are numerous good people in society who are working hard to keep things in order and to provide necessary services to fellow citizens. Though I have not been able to do much as yet in this respect, I certainly hope that I too shall succeed in being a useful citizen by offering my services to society.

Asis: This question gives me scope to say something that I've been meaning to say for a long time now. I know for a fact that the environmental science paper is not taught properly in most of the colleges under Calcutta University, although it's mandatory to do so according to the rules of the University. In Vidyamandira we had all the classes, and some very high-profile professors came to deliver lectures; this still amazes me. To be honest, we took those classes very lightly because the paper we had to write was very easy indeed. There used to be so much noise in the classroom that the teachers were hardly audible at times. But we did learn

a few things. And today, whenever I eat a piece of candy or something like that, I carry the plastic packet or wrapper home with me, to put in the dustbin. I never throw the wrappers on the ground, as many people still do. And every time I do this, I feel the success of the teacher who had turned his old voice up to full volume in one of his classes to insert this idea into our minds. We've all learnt our lessons. Of course, this is not to say we've become ideal citizens, but to say that we're among the few who are close to being that. Things of this kind inspire me to become a better teacher, and tell me that a good teacher never loses or is lost; his teachings never completely miss their mark. And for a student of Vidyamandira, such incidents are available in plenty.

In Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda wanted to rehabilitate the past glories of India through an education which would not merely combine in it the best elements of Eastern and Western cultures but would at the same time hold aloft the Indian ideals of devotion, wisdom, and morality. Real education, he said, enables people to stand on their own feet and helps them to manifest their inherent perfection through a harmonious development of head, hand, and heart. In his opinion, a balanced combination of secular and spiritual training constitutes true education.

The process of education outlined by Swamiji is not easy, and the value systems that he stresses are difficult to uphold under present-day social conditions. This is evident from the responses of the alumni. But the heartening fact is that they have all tried to practise the values they have learnt to cherish, despite the odds, and in so doing they have been making their mark as valuable citizens of the world.



The food that feeds the needy—that alone true charity is,
True men they who that simple truth do find;
But they who hoard, like water in pools past access,
To eat and gorge—to charity's ways are they blind.

—Tirumular

Facing Ethical Dilemmas

Dilip Dhopavkar and Prashant Puppal

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA started the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897. One important aim of the organization was to awaken India from the deep slumber into which it had fallen. Swami Vivekananda had tremendous faith in the Indian youth and believed they would find success in a value-based life.

Social currents and trends are like the changing fashions of our times. They come and go. Values are eternal and unchanging. But over time, these passing trends leave residual impressions and often obliterate the original values. From time to time one needs to retrieve the true values and separate them from the distortion created by passing trends. This is the true role of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in society, as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda.

India is fast re-emerging as a world economic power. On the brink of such growth it is worth examining our values to ensure that there is no lag between inner and outer progress. It would necessarily be superficial progress if it were only an external one. With this idea in mind, the Ramakrishna Math, Pune, organized a seminar in which members of its youth forum shared their personal experiences on real-life ethical dilemmas and articulated their feelings and responses to such situations. Forty youth—sixteen women and twenty-four men aged seventeen to twenty-seven—participated in the seminar. The group included sixteen students; the rest were employed youth, largely IT professionals. We present here some of the thoughts that were shared during this process. The aim of the discussion was to generate data about youth responses rather than pass judgment or seek definitive answers to complex problems.

Hit and Run?

While driving, you knock someone down in a not-very-busy area. What do you do? Do you stop and see how badly the person is injured, or flee as fast as possible?

Abhijit: I faced such a situation around six months back. It occurred at Dattawadi, just five minutes from the Ramakrishna Math, Pune. I was driving at 25 kph, when a *dabbawalla* (carrying milk for sale on a motorbike) came across and struck my vehicle. I stopped my vehicle in the middle of the road and picked him up. Soon people gathered around, but instead of understanding the situation, they started hitting me. Thank God, my friends were around and tackled the situation, and I was saved. After this experience I started thinking that if this happened again, I would run away from the place. But I regularly visit the Math, and Swamiji has told us not to approach people and situations with preconceived notions but to check any given situation and react accordingly.

Prashant Puppal: You said that your friends came and tackled the situation. What exactly did they do?

Abhijit: They pacified the mob. The person involved in the accident started asking for money, as his vehicle had had some damage. But my vehicle had also been damaged, though his damage was slightly greater. The beating was entirely unexpected and my tooth was broken.

Madhura: I had a morning lecture at my college and was travelling from home. I had to take a left turn and was indicating so. There was a rickshaw coming and I thought the driver had seen my signal; but, apparently, he hadn't. Our vehicles collided; my car got scratched and his indicators broke. He seemed very poor—that's probably

why he was driving a rickshaw. I thought it was my mistake; maybe he didn't see me, or maybe I took the turn too fast. He started saying, 'Madam you don't watch while driving!' I said, 'I am sorry.' I just handled the matter very peacefully without shouting at him, because I knew I was at fault and that he would need money. He was angry and wanted me to go with him to a mechanic. I said I couldn't come with him on account of the lecture. So I gave him a hundred rupees to cover the damage to his rickshaw. That's how I solved the problem.

Dilip Dhopavakar: One important point here is that you admitted that it was your mistake. Perhaps that reduced his temper.

Madhura: I think so.

Dilip Dhopavakar: So do I. What is the opinion of others? If you admit your mistake immediately, it has a dramatic effect; it soothes the other person's ego so that he is not in a reactive mood anymore.

Kailash: The reverse incident happened to me: somebody knocked me down. I was riding a brand-new motorcycle, with my sister seated behind me. A Zen car, coming from the right, hit us. It was his mistake, because my indicator was on. My sister was injured. In our society, the person who is riding or driving the bigger vehicle is normally considered the culprit. People gathered around, but I asked them to calm down and let us handle the situation—I just dispersed the crowd. Then I talked with the other driver and found that he also was a good person; he realized that it was his mistake. Then we took my sister to the hospital. It was kind of him to admit that the accident was his fault, and he covered the repairs for my bike; he had, of course, his insurance.

Amrita: Three or four years ago, I was cycling home from school one Saturday. I had not eaten lunch that day, and I fainted and fell down right in the middle of Swargate square. At that same moment, the traffic signal in front of me turned green, and a Hero Honda motorcycle passed over my hand. No sooner did the motorbike rider try to pick me up, than the police arrived on the scene, and the rider fled. I thought he was going to help me, but because

of the crowd that gathered, he ran away. From that day I decided in my mind that if I came upon any such accident, I would try my best to help.

Recently, a similar incident took place near our school. Our class had just finished, and coming outside, we saw a girl on a scooter being struck by a vehicle. She was thrown from her bike and fell to the ground. Since class had just finished, all the students were nearby; they all gathered around the scene, but merely stood and watched. I ran to the girl, picked her up, picked up her scooter, made her sit comfortably, and gave her water. After all this had happened, my classmates started asking whether that girl was my friend. I said, 'No, I don't even know her.' All were observing me while I was helping the girl, but nobody came forward to help. I thought, 'Should we help someone only if we know them?' Everybody was observing me, thinking that I was helping the girl because she was a close relative.

Kiran: I have faced such a situation once: I was stopped in my own vehicle at a red light. A person in a Fiat came from behind and rammed into my car. Fortunately nothing happened to anyone sitting in the car. But what I found was that by being very calm and very quiet and not making much fuss, I ended up on the receiving end. The other person was not even apologetic; on the contrary, he began charging me! Fortunately the crowd had seen that the other man was at fault. Sometimes it seems that if you are polite, that is taken as a weakness. Finally, nothing much happened. I called the police, but as usual they did not come for quite some time. And I had to slowly convince that man that it was his fault. I took a lot of photographs and made it clear that he would be in trouble. He finally became apologetic. But I was left a little confused as to how to handle such situations. If you are polite and calm, the other person says that it was your mistake! It's a dilemma.

Umesh: Once I had gone with some friends to a restaurant for dinner. From the restaurant we saw an accident involving three or four bikes. We saw a woman falling down on the road. Just after this an Indica car ran into a Zen car. The Indica was a call-centre car; after the collision it fled. In the

Zen car there was a lady driver along with her old parents. After the accident, nobody came forward to help the lady. There had been a loud crash, and I felt that there were surely injuries, and that I should see if I could render any assistance. There were five or six spectators watching the scene. A man came forward and opened the door of the car. I went and saw what had happened to the lady. I asked another person to call a rickshaw and arranged for the lady to be taken to the hospital. I also noted down her phone number and she noted down mine. The next day I received a call from her. She thanked me and said that I had helped her a lot, that thanks to me they could reach the hospital. I reported the incident to the newspaper and police by calling 100, and the call-centre vehicle was tracked down. The expenses incurred by the lady were reimbursed by the insurance company as well as by the Indica owner. Because of all this, the call-centre driver learnt a lesson. But by the grace of God, there were no serious injuries, and the lady also got treatment at the hospital. In Pune, people usually ignore accidents and drive away; it is such a regular occurrence that people think it doesn't need any attention. But I feel that in such situations we must offer some help; so that is what I did.

Satya: My wife and I were driving to the office one morning, passing through an area where many elderly people go for a stroll. We passed an elderly gentleman taking his walk, and made a turn at a blind corner; there was a car coming from the other side too and we passed each other at the turn. At that moment, I heard a loud thud and realized—I don't know if it was intuition or what—that somebody had been hit. I immediately stopped the car and ran over to see if it was the old man who was walking. Yes, he had fallen down and was breathing very hard; I didn't know what to do. But I was glad that the other car had also stopped and that the driver came to see what happened. I told him, 'This guy looks like he's not doing well; we need to take him to the hospital.' Fortunately there was another man, I don't know who he was, who came up and also helped us put him in the car, the car that hit

him. Then the other driver took him to the hospital. So I realized a good thing: that people do stop and help. I also realized that I was doing the same.

There was a second incident which took place at nearly the same spot. An elderly man on his scooter came out of a residential complex. I passed him, and he was close to the back door of my car. There was a cyclist riding in front of me. Now the scooter rider wanted to overtake the cyclist, and taking a sudden right turn, hit my car. At that point—I don't know what happened to me—but I really lost control, not control of the car but control of my mind. I really got annoyed. Luckily I was not driving fast, and he was also going slowly. But I spontaneously lost complete control of my mind and shouted at the man. He was an elderly man. I don't know why, I just felt I had to talk to him in a very bad way. No bad language, but in a very loud voice. He was visibly disturbed too and tried to put the blame on me, which added to my annoyance. So in one situation I tried to help, and in another, I was shouting at somebody.

Ravindra: I am from rural parts. I don't have experience with city accidents, but in my village I had some experiences that I would like to share. I have observed that usually in an accident which involves a motorcycle and a pedestrian, even if the pedestrian is at fault, people beat the motorcyclist. In short, the driver of the bigger vehicle is held responsible in any accident, irrespective of whose mistake it is. If a truck hits a pedestrian, even if it is the pedestrian's mistake, villagers will break the truck's window. This has happened many a time, at least in villages. Moreover, accidents that happen near the highways are mostly killer accidents, and when the injured are taken to the hospital they are first asked for money, a deposit, only then are they admitted.

Software Pirate, You?

Do you feel a prick of conscience while clicking the 'I Agree' button on the license agreement when installing pirated software?

Pranav: I just installed Windows Vista on my computer and really did not feel a prick of

conscience while clicking on 'I Agree', because, for one, Windows Vista is outrageously priced. It is priced at twelve or thirteen thousand rupees, which, as a student, I simply can't afford for an operating system. And I believe Microsoft is making enough money.

Nitin: I disagree with Pranav. I work for a software company. I feel that when somebody uses pirated software, my salary is affected. Everybody should think about that. Microsoft engineers are putting their brains into Windows and are working hard for it. Microsoft and Bill Gates deserve that money. If you think that Microsoft is making enough money, you should use Linux instead. That is another competitive operating system and is free of charge. So I feel that we should think deeply before installing pirated software. The case is the same with movies and other copyrighted items. This is my opinion.

Dilip Dhopavakar: But before you joined your company, you were on the other side, weren't you? You were in his group then. So we need to think how and why this change in attitude takes place.

Nitin: Yes.

Satya: When I was a computer-engineering student, I never knew what pirated software was. I used to install pirated software on my machine and use it, using cracks or known keys. I didn't understand what piracy was—at that time, in the nineties, no one knew. No one cared much about that. But when I went to the Indian Institute of Technology, and then for my masters and my job, I started to realize what piracy is. But still we had two thoughts about it. First, is the software good enough to spend money on? Second, can I get it free? So now, if I click the 'I Agree' button, I feel bad that again I am using pirated software. Nowadays I try not to use pirated software; I try to buy. For example, I used to have a pirated copy of Windows XP, but now I have bought a licensed copy, and all other software which I use I try to buy. If I don't, then—as the gentleman there mentioned—I work with Linux. So it was a slow change: earlier I never knew about it, later I knew but still was using it, and now I am trying not to use pirated software.

Vaibhav: I am an engineering student. We often need to install very costly software on our own computers, which we simply can't afford. These software companies don't have any concern for students. That's why even our professors teach us how to crack software and how to install them on our systems. So I don't feel anything while clicking the 'I Agree' button.

Dilip Dhopavakar: You don't feel any prick of conscience at all.

Vaibhav: No.

Prashant Puppal: Are there other software engineers here?

Sagar: I just completed my BE Mechanical and joined the local MIT college to learn how to use some specialized engineering software. I asked the professor for a copy of the software, but he told me that he would not be able to give me the institute's copy. Instead, he gave me a phone number and told me that some people would install that software on a home PC for two or three hundred rupees. Though I think that to use pirated software is improper, I have to go through this route as I don't have enough money to purchase a licensed copy of the software.

Kiran: We have in fact used a lot of software for making our presentation at the Math. While doing so I never had any prick of conscience because I was doing it to help with the service activities of the Math.*

Atreyi: I am afraid I am merely a consumer. I don't know anything about the technicalities. No, I don't feel any prick of conscience. Some of you might know about the free software movement: there is a whole lobby trying to free computer users from the tyranny of Microsoft taking over the whole market. People probably feel that Microsoft has so much money, is such a huge empire, that it can't lose from a little taking, that is, using some pirated software. It's easy to take from a place that has so much.

Dilip Dhopavakar: So what's the end result: do

* This is the speaker's personal opinion. It is the official policy of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission to use licensed software at its centres.

you feel a prick of conscience or not?

Atreyi: No! [Loud laughter]

Dilip Dhopavakar: No, you don't. See, one can justify with tremendous force any kind of act. But, while doing that—while justifying—still inside, in your inner mind, is there a prick of conscience?

Atreyi: That gentleman there—when he said, 'I have used it for the Math'—his intention supercedes the doubts he has about using it. I am not using pirated software for anything wrong and I know very well that I am not going to use it for something wrong.

Dilip Dhopavakar: No, no; if you observed his statement very closely—he felt a prick of conscience, but he justified his act by saying that it was done for the Math. The whole question is whether our values bring up that conscience or not. So we just want to know whether you feel that prick of conscience or not.

Abhijit: We supply computers to a number of institutes. It is our daily routine to install software on many machines. I don't feel any prick of conscience because, indirectly, I am marketing a Micro-soft product. I feel that way.

Dilip Dhopavakar: So your justification is so strong that it overpowers the conscience!

Sanyogita: After listening to the views of all of these people, I too feel like talking, though my contact with computers is restricted to dealing with just two or three programmes. I have always used pirated software or software given to me by somebody. I have never purchased software as I could never afford the cost. I have to always update the software to the latest version and I can't possibly pay up every time I update. But I do have in mind that, though currently I use pirated software, someday I will be able to purchase licensed copies.

Vishal: I sometimes do, and sometimes don't feel that prick of conscience, depending on the conditions. For instance, if I am installing Norton Anti-Virus on the computer and I feel that a pirated version would harm my computer, then I would go for a licensed version. So the outside protection is original and inside I put everything pirated, like

Windows and other software that I need. So it depends on the condition.

Dilip Dhopavakar: So, your conscience is conditional!

Seema: We have had a computer at our home for many years now. It has had pirated software all along; in fact, we did not know that there is such a thing called original software! We are using the software that came pre-installed with the system. Whenever I have software-related problems with my PC, I call a person who can fix it. Every time he repairs the software he charges around three hundred rupees. The repaired software works without trouble for a month; then I have to call him again, and pay again. I have been working like this all along. Though I now understand that there is original software available on the market, I can't afford to purchase it. But neither do I like to pay three hundred rupees every month to keep my computer running.

Prashant Puppal: Though you don't like to pay up every month, you can't break the habit now, right?

Seema: Yes.

Dilip Dhopavakar: The issue has many facets.

Ameya: I also use pirated software. When I click 'I Agree', I feel it is not good to do it—but at the same time I feel that it is alright, because I can't afford such software. Secondly, though I feel bad when installing pirated software, still, by doing so I am supporting a big, flourishing industry. When you pay a software guy, you are actually supporting a big industry and are helping to employ a lot of people. It may be wrong—yet people are getting employed because of this, and there are many unemployed people in India. So you are helping India to grow in this manner!

Prashant Puppal: [laughs] That's a good one! So we shouldn't really regret an act which has a positive side to it!

How Badly Do You Need a Job?

Your family is not doing well, and you need to get a job. To get a job with the police, you need to pay Rs 50,000, which you can somehow gather. Will you say no?

Hari*: I will not do such a thing. I can invest the Rs 50,000 somewhere and do something else. So I wouldn't take such a job.

Satya: In such situations there is something called practical conscience. You have a family, or you have your parents, brothers, and sisters to support—and you are getting a job. You need to do that. I think ninety-nine per cent of people would take the job if they could. This is something of a practical situation. My thought, practically speaking, would be to take the job.

Prashant Puppal: You will compromise with ethics?

Satya: As I just said, it could be a practical situation, and yes, I would compromise.

Sita*: I would certainly take the job by paying Rs 50,000, because that would save the family. If

I rejected the job my family would suffer, which would be a greater loss. So I would compromise with my conscience. The fact that I am protecting my family would give me more satisfaction than assuaging my conscience.

Prashant Puppal: And how about your family? Will they be happy?

Sita: Yes, because the need of the hour was money. If they needed money I would take the job.

Puja: As others have said, this is a practical situation. If I have to pay Rs 50,000 for a job, and if my salary would be some two, three, or five thousand, I don't think it's logical. But if my salary was forty or fifty thousand ... [laughter]

Prashant Puppal: The price of that job would be quite high in that case!

Puja: It is a practical situation.

(To be concluded)

* Names marked with an asterisk are not the participants' real names.

Mother Earth

'Help, help!' shouts **Mother Earth**. But no one listens to her, and she is forced to do the unpredictable, the unthinkable—she is forced to bring about **DOOMSDAY**, killing and destroying everything she had ever created out of remorse. Never had she done this before, never had she even thought of it, never had she wanted to kill

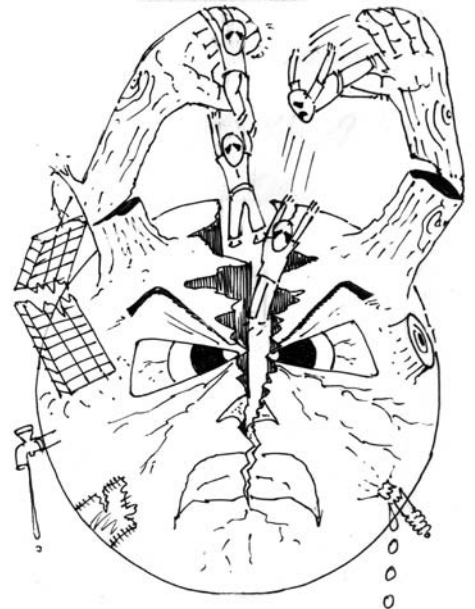
her own children, who were the 'children of God'.

Today humans are exploiting Mother Nature and stripping her of all her riches and energy. Human have become more and more greedy and what Gandhiji once said, 'Nature has everything for man's need but not for his greed', is very much applicable today.



It is high time we awaken from our slumber of ignorance and greed and learn to respect the life-giving Mother Earth for the benevolent gifts that she has showered upon us since the beginning of time. We need to preserve the nurturer of all creatures, the forever-green and all-generous Mother Earth.

Artwork by Manjunath M
Script by Sagar G Nahar
Class Ten, Sri Ramakrishna
Vidyalaya, Mysore



Buddha in Swami Vivekananda's Eyes

Swami Sandarshananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THREE personalities profoundly moved Swami Vivekananda in his youth: Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna, and Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur. Buddha he had studied deeply, and his brief association with Pavhari Baba was sufficient for him to confirm his exalted spiritual state. But it was only in Sri Ramakrishna, whom Swamiji examined day in and day out, that he found Buddha. About his master he says: 'His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India.'¹⁴ Seeing Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi and hearing from him about his experience in that state must have given Swamiji insights into Buddha's nirvana. With his sharp intellect and monistic training, he would have quickly understood that the nirvana of Buddhism and samadhi are identical, both being realizations of the ultimate Reality. He was aware that academic deliberation alone cannot remove confusion but rather creates it. So Sri Ramakrishna's remarks on Buddha, illumined as they were by the Master's realization, would have immediately struck Swamiji as being authentic. Sri Ramakrishna declares: 'I have heard a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, immutable, inactive, and of the nature of Consciousness. When a man merges his *buddhi*, his intelligence, in *Bodha*, Consciousness, then he attains the Knowledge of Brahman; he becomes *buddha*, enlightened.'¹⁵ Needless to say, Vivekananda's conviction that nirvana and *brahma-jnāna* or knowledge of Brahman are identical was surely reinforced when he himself experienced samadhi by the blessings of his guru.

Buddha's *anātmavāda* or doctrine of 'no-self' is an oft-misunderstood principle; scholars often take

it as being opposed to the *ātmavāda* of the Upanishads. But Swamiji is not perplexed by this seeming dichotomy. He was able to see that, by *ātmā* or self, Buddha never meant the absolute Self or *paramātmā*. Swamiji equates Buddha's *ātmā* with the mind, which is in a state of flux and has no permanent existence. He learnt from Sri Ramakrishna that 'a man attains Brahmajñana as soon as his mind is annihilated' (776). When the mind and ego die, the Self—the only changeless Substance, which is again the material as well as efficient cause of the universe—is directly perceived. By nirvana Buddha would have meant annihilation of mind or destruction of the small self, the ego, which is the seat of all ignorance and the root of all suffering.

Swamiji had a vigorous discussion about Buddha with his guru on 9 April 1886. He said that Buddha 'could not express in words what he had realized by his tapasyā. So people say he was an atheist.' The conversation continued:

MASTER: 'Why atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words. Do you know what "Buddha" means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence Itself.'

NARENDRA: 'Yes, sir. There are three classes of Buddhas: Buddha, Arhat, and Bodhisattva.'

MASTER: 'This too is a sport of God Himself, a new līlā of God.'

'Why should Buddha be called an atheist? When one realizes Svarupa, the true nature of one's Self, one attains a state that is something between *asti*, *is*, and *nāsti*, *is-not*.'

NARENDRA (*to M.*): 'It is a state in which contradictions meet. ...'

'In that state both activity and non-activity are possible; that is to say, one then performs unselfish action.'

‘Worldly people, who are engrossed in sense-objects, say that everything exists—*asti*. But the *māyāvādīs*, the illusionists, say that nothing exists—*nāsti*. The experience of a Buddha is beyond both “existence” and “non-existence.”’

MASTER: ‘This “existence” and “non-existence” are attributes of Prakriti. The Reality is beyond both.’ ...

‘What did Buddha preach?’

NARENDRA: ‘He did not discuss the existence or non-existence of God. But he showed compassion for others all his life’ (947–8).

Sri Ramakrishna didn’t say anything more. This clearly indicates his satisfaction with Narendra—Swamiji—for understanding that Buddha’s experience was nothing but the non-dualistic experience taught in the Upanishads, an experience in which he himself was adept. He must have been specially happy that Swamiji so admired Buddha’s compassion, for he knew that Swamiji too was born to alleviate the misery of the world.

The crude materialism that Buddha had to encounter taught: ‘Eat, drink, and be merry; there is no God, soul, or heaven; religion is a concoction of wicked priests.’¹⁶ It preached the morality that so long as one lives one must try to enjoy, even borrowing money from others and not thinking of returning the debt. It was a popular philosophy that easily captured the imagination of the people. To save people from this menace Buddha brought the teachings of Vedanta to all without restriction. Swamiji says: ‘This Advaita was never allowed to come to the people. At first some monks got hold of it and took it to the forests ... By the mercy of the Lord, the Buddha came and preached it to the masses’ (2.138). Thus he rescued India from hideous practices.

He Preached the Highest Philosophy

Sister Nivedita remembers that ‘chief of intellectual passions with the Swami, was his reverence for Buddha.’¹⁷ Buddha’s philosophical insight, Swamiji believed, was directly inspired by Upanishadic thought. He deemed Buddha’s view as one of the most original in its scientific spirit, which enabled

him to close the divide between faith and reason. In order to do this, he had, as Radhakrishnan puts it, ‘only to rid the Upanishads of their inconsistent compromises with Vedic polytheism and religion, set aside the transcendental aspect as being indemonstrable to thought and unnecessary to morals, and emphasise the ethical universalism of the Upanishads.’¹⁸ Buddha accepts the law of karma—like all the orthodox systems of philosophy—and his view of suffering as an unavoidable fact of life is shared by nearly all schools of Indian thought. Hence, his doctrine cannot be considered an aberration of Indian thought; rather, as Radhakrishnan says, ‘Buddhism, in its origin at least, is an offshoot of Hinduism’, thus justifying the epithet ‘rebel child of Hinduism’ applied by Swamiji (361).

Swamiji describes how Buddha strove for illumination, ‘until he reached that supersensuous state of mind. All his teachings came through this, and not through intellectual cogitations.’¹⁹ In that state he discovered the law of dependent origination, ‘an eternal law governing the phenomenal world’. The goal is permanent liberation from its control. So he does not care for ‘dualist gods’ but only for a ‘supersensuous state of existence’, where the law of dependent origination does not hold.

Dependent Origination

In Buddha’s view, everything is an aggregate of qualities, hence inevitably a compound. And that which is compounded is ever-changing and has no permanent existence. Therefore, the world, being a conglomerate of combinations, is in a state of constant flux, having no permanent substratum to bear the ceaseless flow of change. It is neither real nor unreal but something in between. Similarly, body and mind are two separate entities constantly changing in form, two streams, of matter and thought respectively. The close succession of changes appears as a unity—an illusion of continuity, like the circle of fire produced by a whirling torch. There is no immutable substance within them sustaining their flux; they are self-sufficient. To be caught in this flux and momentariness is to lose freedom and

suffer through endless births. The only remedy is emancipation from the vicious circle of causation, the cycle of dependent origination.

Buddha, before his awakening, lamented, 'In what miserable condition are the people! They are born, they decay, they die, pass away and are born again; and they do not know the path of escape from this path of decay, death and misery.'²⁰ At enlightenment, he discovered that this cycle of *samsāra* is powered by a chain of twelve links. In fact, he found that all of relative existence is bound in a web of cause and effect; nothing has an independent existence of its own. He then formulated the law of dependent origination, with each of the twelve links or *nidānas*, giving rise to the next. At the root lies *avidyā* or ignorance, which leads to *saṃskāra* or mental constructs, which results in *viññāna* or relative consciousness, which has *nāma-rūpa* or name-and-form as its object; this is accomplished by the *ṣaḍāyatana* or six sense organs (including the mind), through *sparsa* or sense-contact, which leads to *vedanā* or feeling, which produces *trṣṇā* or desire, and *upādāna* or clinging, which leads to *bhava* or becoming, to *jāti* or birth, and to *jarā-marāṇa* or old age and death.

These twelve links turn the wheel of *samsāra*. With the extinction of ignorance, which is the root cause, all the other causes involved in the cycle also cease, putting an end to rebirth and suffering. Buddha observed that in nirvana alone is ignorance annihilated and are beings released from the shackles of dependent origination. But he uses no word other than *śūnya* or void to describe nirvana. This mute stance eloquently conveys his profound feelings, which resonate with the non-dualistic teachings of the Upanishads. Swamiji praises the way these thoughts are knit, and says: 'We see how wonderful some of these arguments are, and they appeal easily to the ordinary experience of humanity—in fact, not one in a million can think of anything other than phenomena' (2.273). Buddha points the way to freedom; he knows that the ultimate truth is beyond reason, beyond mind and speech—a matter of 'Pure Intelligence', far beyond the limited in-

telligence operating within time and space.

Buddha says, to withdraw from flux is to attain nirvana. In deep contemplation, the mind and body are found to be substance-less and therefore illusory. But according to Yoga-Vedānta, with further progress it becomes clear that there is an unchangeable substratum on which the changing mind and body are projected, a fact many Mahayana schools seem to implicitly accept. When this substratum is perceived, one can no longer be deluded by them, for one sees that they have no independent existence. Hence, in that state there is nothing to be observed. But there still persists that which realizes—though there is no differentiation between subject and object. There is yet one more step: with the ripening of non-dual realization, everything that was denied earlier is cognized as real. The experience of unity of the phenomenal world and its observer is the most blessed condition, which Buddha describes as nirvana or *śūnya*. *Śūnya*, accordingly, is not negative but something most positive that destroys the last trace of ignorance sprouting from the notion of duality.

Buddha's followers gave a different interpretation, since they wanted to assert the independence of Buddha's philosophical framework from the ideas of the Upanishads. Swamiji points out their defects with unfettered voice:

So far as the Buddhists say that the whole universe is a mass of change, they are perfectly right; so long as I am separate from the universe, so long as I stand back and look at something before me, so long as there are two things—the looker-on and the thing looked upon—it will appear always that the universe is one of change, continuously changing all the time. But the reality is that there is both change and changelessness in this universe. It is not that the soul and the mind and the body are three separate existences, for this organism made of these three is really one. It is the same thing which appears as the body, as the mind, and as the thing beyond mind and body, but it is not at the same time all these. He who sees the body does not see the mind even, he who sees the mind does not see that which he calls the soul, and he who

sees the soul—for him the body and mind have vanished. He who sees only motion never sees absolute calm, and he who sees absolute calm—for him motion has vanished.²¹

Swamiji sees their view of the denial of existence of self, or substance, and acceptance of qualities as a ‘miscalculation’, for qualities are seen by ‘an ordinary man’ and substance by a realized person; they are not at the same level of perception, differing in their spiritual attainments. Buddha had the same concept in mind. He separated sense experience from experience of the superconscious state. He said: ‘There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, O mendicants, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made, and the compounded.’²²

Buddha was an avowed proponent of renunciation. He inducted so many men and women into the order of monks and nuns because he believed in annihilation of all imperfection through the sacrifice of material enjoyments, considering that as a compulsory precondition for realizing the perfect supersensuous state of abiding peace and happiness.

This Vedantic attitude of Buddha was always attractive to Swamiji. He said, ‘I always cling to the idea set forth with one voice by Christ, Buddha, and the Vedanta, that we must all come to the perfection in time, but only by giving up this imperfection.’²³ By ‘imperfection’ he means *jīvatva*, or ‘the apparent man’, which in Buddha’s language is the one who is born, originated, made, and compounded. Christ, Buddha, and Vedanta—finding them rooted in the same spiritual values, Swamiji names them in the same breath with equal reverence. The teachings of Buddha and the Upanishads, however, differ in their points of emphasis: the former emphasizes the impermanence of sense experience, and the latter the permanent and immutable reality behind it, but in the end they say the same thing. Swamiji gives his final reading on Buddha: ‘Stern, sane, every brain-cell perfect and complete, even at the moment of death. No delusion. I do not agree with many of his doctrines. You may not. But in my opinion—oh,

if I had only one drop of that strength! The sanest philosopher the world ever saw’ (3.528–9).

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda does hold Buddha responsible for the degeneration of Buddhism. But, nevertheless, he praises him for the ‘missionary zeal’ he infused in his followers, a zeal that eventually called forth ‘the first historical outburst of a world religion’. On the other hand, he also holds that by popularizing monasticism, Buddha brought about society’s downfall. He argues:

Monasticism is all very good for a few; but when you preach it in such a fashion that every man or woman who has a mind immediately gives up social life, when you find over the whole of India monasteries, some containing a hundred thousand monks, sometimes twenty thousand monks in one building... who were left to procreate progeny, to continue the race? Only the weaklings. All the strong and vigorous minds went out. And then came national decay by the sheer loss of vigour (3.533–4).

The folly of making monasticism commonplace exacted an enormous price. Buddha’s principles of poverty and purity were supplanted by plenty and pretension. Admission to the order was freely given; that the life of renunciation is not suitable for all, that it requires great inner preparation, was seemingly overlooked. Consequently, in time the order was unable to provide moral sustenance to society, which began to slide downwards. Swamiji calls the result ‘a mass of corruption’. He says: ‘I have every respect and veneration for Lord Buddha, but mark my words, the spread of Buddhism was less owing to the doctrines and personality of the great preacher, than to the temples that were built, the idols that were erected, and the gorgeous ceremonials that were put before the nation’ (3.217). Swamiji felt ashamed even to mention the vulgar depths to which Buddhism fell.

But there is a perennial dynamic in India that naturally absorbs such cyclical shocks to the field of dharma. When the time was ripe, the old reli-

gion drew it in, exalting Buddha as an incarnation of God; Buddhism thus lost its status as a separate religion in India. As Swamiji says, 'This gigantic child was absorbed, in the long run, by the mother that gave it birth' (3.512). By and by, a new era of the Sanatana Dharma, the Religion Eternal, emerged with the appearance of Shankaracharya and others following him; they dexterously purged it of the accumulated dross and restored Hinduism to its true form.

Buddha allowed all to join the order; and materialism later stifled it. His mission can be seen as contributing to the later collapse of India by rendering the Indian race intrinsically powerless, through the practice of non-injury and detachment from temporal affairs. These are, broadly, reasons for which Swamiji sometimes criticizes Buddha; and he freely speaks his mind: 'I love the Master's ideal. Great! But, for me, I do not think that the working was very practical; and that was one of the great causes that led to the downfall of the Indian nation, in the long run' (3.535). However, he never commingles Buddha's work with his character; for that draws his inspired admiration to the last. Buddha was born at a crucial juncture in Indian history. The prevailing circumstances warranted his advent. He led an exemplary life to be emulated for all time. In Swami Vivekananda's eyes, Buddha was the finest fruit of humanity.

It will not be inappropriate to present here excerpts from Swamiji's letter of 9 February 1902 to his disciple Swami Swarupananda. Written a few months before his passing away, the letter demonstrates how Swamiji was engrossed in Buddha and Buddhism, even through the last months of his life:

There are references ... in Buddhistic literature, to Vedanta, and the Mahayana school of Buddhism is even Advaitistic. Why does Amara Singha, a Buddhist, give as one of the names of Buddha—Advayavādi? ...

I hold the Mahayana to be the older of the two schools of Buddhism. ...


I have had much light of late about Buddhism, and I am ready to prove:

... That Shiva-worship, in various forms, antedated the Buddhists, that the Buddhists tried to get hold of the sacred places of the Shaivas but, failing in that, made new places in the precincts just as you find now at Bodh-Gaya and Sarnath (Varanasi). ...

Gaya was a place of ancestor-worship already, and the footprint-worship the Buddhists copied from the Hindus. ...

Many are the new facts I have gathered in Bodh-Gaya and from Buddhist literature. ...

A total revolution has occurred in my mind about the relation of Buddhism and Neo-Hinduism. I may not live to work out the glimpses, but I shall leave the lines of work indicated, and you and your brethren will have to work it out (5.172–3).

Swamiji has given us enough food for thought. He points out that there are many things in Buddhism which are untenable and demand fresh as well as unprejudiced research. But he does not deny that Buddha contributed immensely to the development of India. He is full of praise for monasteries, schools, colleges, hospitals, veterinary refuges, rich architecture, art, and sculpture left by Buddhism. His view in this regard is unequivocal: 'What was there in this country before Buddha's advent? Only a number of religious principles recorded on bundles of palm leaves—and those too known only to a few. It was Lord Buddha who brought them down to the practical field and showed how to apply them in the everyday life of the people. In a sense, *he* was the living embodiment of true Vedanta' (7.118–9). 

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Sri Ramakrishna: Patron Saint of the Bengali Stage

Swami Chetanananda

Star Theatre
Beacon Street, Calcutta (1883–88)

GIRISHCHANDRA GHOSH, the noted Bengali playwright and prominent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, brought his master to see many of his plays. And by doing so, Girish made him the patron saint of the Bengali stage. Through his plays, Girish carried Ramakrishna's message to the red-light districts of Calcutta.

Christopher Isherwood notes: 'In those days, actresses in the Bengali theatre were regarded as no better than prostitutes—a prejudice which also persisted in England until at least the beginning of the nineteenth century.'¹ About Girish's discipleship to Ramakrishna, he observes: 'One curious result of their association is that, today, Ramakrishna's picture is to be found hanging backstage in nearly every theatre in Calcutta. The actors bow to it before they make their entrances. By giving his approval to Girish's art and encouraging him to continue practising it, Ramakrishna became, as it were, the patron saint of the drama in Bengal' (254).

Nowadays it is no disgrace to go to the theatre, opera, or cinema. On the contrary, one is considered to be uncultured, uneducated, and unsophisticated if one does not attend such cultural events. But in Ramakrishna's time, conservative Hindu society in Bengal, the progressive Brahmo Samaj, and other groups abhorred the stage because they considered the performers to be immoral drunkards, debauchees, and prostitutes. Theatres were therefore considered to be sinful places. Under these circumstances, it was shocking when Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who was regarded as an illumined soul and even as an avatara, went to see Girish's *Chaitanya Lila* on 24 September 1884 at the Star Theatre in Calcutta. Some conservative

and prudish Bengalis considered Ramakrishna's action, and his subsequent visits to the theatre, to be unpardonable.

The first repercussions came from the Brahmos. Hemendranath Dasgupta wrote:

'Many people of the Brahmo Samaj stopped visiting Ramakrishna. After Keshab Sen passed away on 8 January 1884, Vijaykrishna Goswami became devoted to the Master. Shivanath Shastri, however, stopped coming to him. Some people asked Shivanath: "Previously you were devoted to the Master. Why do you not visit him anymore?" Shivanath replied: "How can I go to see him? He is now connected with the immoral people of the theatre. I can't go to Dakshineswar anymore."²

One day Ramakrishna discussed Girish with Ashwini Datta, a devout Hindu philanthropist.

'Do you know Girish Ghosh?' Ramakrishna asked.

'Which Girish Ghosh? The one who is in the theatre?'

'Yes.'

'I have never seen him. But I know him by reputation.'

'A good man.'

'They say he drinks.'

'Let him! Let him! How long will he continue that?'

Ramchandra Datta, a Vaishnava and a staunch devotee of Ramakrishna, did not approve of the Master's visits to the theatre either. Girish wrote: 'Wherever the Master went, Ramchandra invariably accompanied him. But when the Master came to the theatre, Ram did not come—but he did have food sent to him [Ramakrishna]. Ram considered the theatre to be a sinful place.'⁴

M recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

Sri Ramakrishna was planning to go to a performance of the *Chaitanyalīlā* at the Star Theatre. Mahendra Mukherji was to take him to Calcutta in his carriage. They were talking about choosing good seats. Some suggested that one could see the performance well from the one-rupee gallery. Ram said, 'Oh, no! I shall engage a box for him.' The Master laughed. Some of the devotees said that public women took part in the play. They took the parts of Nimāi, Nitāi, and others.

MASTER (*to the devotees*): 'I shall look upon them as the Blissful Mother Herself. What if one of them acts the part of Chaitanya? An imitation custard-apple reminds one of the real fruit.'⁵

Modern readers may not be bothered by the idea of Ramakrishna's visiting theatres, mixing with drunken actors, and addressing immoral actresses as 'Blissful Mother'. But for many years he and his disciples had to face opposition and criticism from prominent citizens and from society in general. People spoke out against the Master even after he passed away in 1886.

For example, in August 1896, Max Müller wrote an article on Ramakrishna entitled 'A Real Mahatman'. A relative of Keshab Chandra Sen, the famous Brahmo leader, became very jealous. When Max Müller planned to write a biography of Ramakrishna, this man wrote to him in an attempt to change his views. I could not locate the contents of that letter, but Max Müller commented on it in *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*:

A relative of Keshub Chunder Sen, however, who evidently completely misapprehended what was implied by the influence which I said that Ramakrishna had exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, [Pratap] Mozoomdar, and others as his disciples, is very anxious to establish the priority of Keshub Chunder Sen, as if there could be priority in philosophical or religious truth. 'It was Keshub Chunder,' he tells us, 'who brought Ramakrishna out of obscurity.' That may be so, but how often have disciples been instrumental in bringing out their master? He then continues to bring charges against Ramakrishna, which may be true or not, but have nothing to do with the true relation between

Keshub and Ramakrishna. If, as we are told, he did not show sufficient moral abhorrence of prostitutes, he does not stand quite alone in this among the founders of religion. If he did not 'honour the principle of teetotalism according to Western notions,' no one, as far as I know, has ever accused him of any excess in drinking. Such bickerings and cavillings would have been most distasteful both to Keshub Chunder Sen and to Ramakrishna. Both had no words but words of praise and love for each other, and it was a great pity that their mutual relation should have been treated in a jealous spirit, and thereby totally misrepresented.⁶

The Brahmos charged that Ramakrishna 'did not show sufficient moral abhorrence of prostitutes.' In his review of the book, Swami Vivekananda wrote:

Again another charge put forward is that 'he did not show sufficient moral abhorrence of prostitutes.' To this the Professor's rejoinder is very very sweet indeed; he says that in this charge Ramakrishna 'does not stand quite alone among the founders of religion'! Ah! How sweet are these words—they remind one of the prostitute Ambapali, the object of Lord Buddha's divine grace, and of the Samaritan woman who won the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet again, another charge is that he did not hate those who were intemperate in their habits. Heaven save the mark! One must not tread even on the shadow of a man, because he took a sip or two of drink—is not that the meaning? A formidable accusation indeed! Why did not the Mahapurusha kick away and drive off in disgust the drunkards, the prostitutes, the thieves, and all the sinners of the world! And why did he not, with eyes closed, talk in a set drawl after the never-to-be-varied tone of the Indian flute-player, or talk in conventional language concealing his thoughts!⁷



With their redeeming power, avatars transform people's characters and make sinners into saints. One morning Jesus went to the temple. People gathered around him. While he was teaching them, a group that included teachers of Jewish law and Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They said to Jesus:

‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In our Law, Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?’ They said this to trap Jesus. Jesus kept quiet at first, but when they repeated the question, he replied, ‘Whichever one of you who has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.’ When they heard this, they all left, one by one. Only Jesus remained with the woman. He then asked her: ‘Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?’

‘No one, sir,’ she answered.

‘Well, then,’ Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.’⁸

‘Hatred cannot be conquered by hatred; it can be conquered only by love,’ said Buddha. Towards the end of his life, Buddha travelled to Kushinagara from Rajagriha and took shelter in the mango grove of the courtesan Ambapali. When she heard of this, she went to visit the Blessed One. As a prudent woman goes forth to perform her religious duties, so she appeared in a simple dress without any ornaments, yet was beautiful to look upon.

Buddha thought to himself: ‘This woman moves in worldly circles and is a favourite of kings and princes; yet is her heart calm and composed. Young in years, rich, surrounded by pleasures, she is thoughtful and steadfast. This, indeed, is rare in the world. ... She, although living in luxury, has acquired the wisdom of a master, taking delight in piety and able to receive the truth in its completeness.’

As Buddha presented his teachings, Ambapali’s face brightened with delight. She then arose and humbly asked: ‘Will the Blessed One do me the honour of taking his meal, together with the brethren, at my house tomorrow?’ The Blessed One silently gave his consent.

Later, the wealthy people of the area came and invited Buddha to eat with them the next day. Buddha declined, explaining, ‘I have already promised to dine tomorrow with Ambapali, the courtesan.’ They departed, saying, ‘A worldly woman has outdone us; we have been left behind by a frivolous girl.’⁹

The next morning Buddha and his disciples went

to Ambapali’s house. After they had eaten, Ambapali sat at Buddha’s feet and offered her mansion and mango grove to his order, which he accepted. Her whole life was transformed and she became a follower of the Blessed One.

There is a saying: ‘A church is not a museum for saints. It is a hospital for sinners.’ It is amazing how love, compassion, and forgiveness are misunderstood by so-called civilized people. When Ramakrishna was criticized for his visits to the theatre, his compassion for the actors and actresses, and his appreciation for their art, his devotees and disciples came forward to defend their guru.

In the beginning, Ramchandra Datta did not approve of the Master’s patronage of the theatre. Later, however, he realized that every one of the Master’s actions had deep meaning and significance, and that he had used his redeeming power to save those wayward souls of the stage. In the 1890s Ram began to lecture now and then at the Star, City, and Minerva theatres on Ramakrishna and his teachings. Ram published an article entitled ‘Society and Morality—Acting’ in the first issue of his magazine, *Tattwamanjari*. The writer of the article supported the theatre as a wonderful medium for carrying education to the masses. He wrote: ‘People are being improved by watching dramas in which the actors and actresses unveil the mystery of spiritual truths. Those who have seen Girish Chandra Ghosh’s *Chaitanya Lila*, *Prabhas Yajna*, and *Buddhadev Charit* at the Star Theatre are truly uplifted and inspired.’¹⁰

The writer defended employing courtesans by pointing out two facts: first, using male actors in female roles was not natural; second, at that time, most women in mainstream society were not willing or able to perform onstage. Therefore, society should not despise actresses, but rather appreciate their talents and their efforts to lead an honest life. For many of the women, the rigid rules of society had forced them to become courtesans; in addition, many of them were murdered every year. Regardless, many actresses were not prostitutes as such, but were poor women who became mistresses of

wealthy men—which was their only means of bettering their condition.

In response to the concern that the characters of young people would be damaged by watching these women act onstage, the writer concluded that youth who have wayward tendencies do not listen to the advice of their parents and school teachers. He stated: 'Of course, it is true that evil company encourages evil tendencies. It is better for society if those who have wicked tendencies go to houses of ill fame rather than spread immorality among their own relatives or neighbours.'

The actress controversy continued for a long time. Swami Vivekananda had been an uncompromising puritan before he met Ramakrishna. On 6 July 1896 he wrote to Francis Leggett about his transformation: 'At twenty years of age I was the most unsympathetic, uncompromising fanatic; I would not walk on the footpath on the theatre side of the streets in Calcutta. At thirty-three, I can live in the same house with prostitutes and never would think of saying a word of reproach to them. Is it degenerate? Or is it that I am broadening out into the Universal Love which is the Lord Himself?'¹¹

Vivekananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnanda from Switzerland on 23 August 1896:

Today I received a letter from Ramdayal Babu, in which he writes that many public women attend the Ramakrishna anniversary festival at Dakshineswar, which makes many less inclined to go there. Moreover, in his opinion, one day should be appointed for men and another for women. My decision on the point is this:

1. If public women are not allowed to go to such a great place of pilgrimage as Dakshineswar, where else shall they go to? It is for the sinful that the Lord manifests Himself specially, not so much for the virtuous.

2. Let distinctions of sex, caste, wealth, learning, and the whole host of them, which are so many gateways to hell, be confined to the world alone. If such distinctions persist in holy places of pilgrimage, where then lies the difference between them and hell itself?

3. Ours is a gigantic City of Jagannatha, where

those who have sinned and those who have not, the saintly and the vicious, men and women and children irrespective of age, all have equal right. That for one day at least in the year thousands of men and women get rid of the sense of sin and ideas of distinction and sing and hear the name of the Lord, is in itself a supreme good.

4. If even in a place of pilgrimage people's tendency to evil be not curbed for one day, the fault lies with you, not them. Create such a huge tidal wave of spirituality that whatever people come near will be swept away.

5. Those who, even in a chapel, would think this is a public woman, that man is of a low caste, a third is poor, and yet another belongs to the masses—the less be the number of such people (that is, whom you call gentlemen) the better. Will they who look to the caste, sex, or profession of Bhaktas appreciate our Lord? I pray to the Lord that hundreds of public women may come and bow their heads at His feet; it does not matter if not one gentleman comes. Come public women, come drunkards, come thieves and all—His Gate is open to all. 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.' Never let such cruel, demoniacal ideas have a place in your mind (6.369–70).

Intolerance, however, was not confined to Bengali society; many Westerners also believed the theatre to be sinful. During Swami Vivekananda's visit to Paris in 1900, he wanted to hear the famous opera singer Emma Calvé sing *Carmen*; he had known Madame Calvé in America, where she had attended many of his lectures. His Irish disciple Sister Nivedita vehemently objected, as Lizelle Reymond tells it in *The Dedicated*:

'I should like to see you in your favourite role,' he [Swamiji] said to her. 'What is it?'

Calvé blushed as she answered, 'It's *Carmen*. Swamiji, you must pardon me, but every evening, in spite of myself, I become that woman when I sing and dance and play my castanets.'

'I shall come and hear you,' said the Swami.

At this point Nivedita broke into the conversation.

'But that's impossible,' she said. 'Swamiji, you can't go to the Opéra Comique; you will be

severely criticized.'

The Swami looked at her in astonishment. His only reply was a tender smile.

And, two evenings later, accompanied by Mr. Leggett, he not only went to hear the opera but was taken to the star's dressing-room during the intermission. Calvé received him with some embarrassment.

'I wanted to see your Carmen, Emma,' he said. 'Don't think she's a bad woman. She is just true. She does not lie. ... And in her violence she expresses her soul. She is of that superb race of women who say to the Divine Mother, after they have prayed to Her, "Don't listen to my prayers, O Mother of God, for I want to die of my desire."'12

Pravasi and other puritanical magazines in Calcutta continued to criticize the practice of allowing courtesans to perform onstage, but *Rangalaya*, *Rangamancha*, *Rangadarshan*, *Majlish*, and other publications supported the custom. The editor of *Rangadarshan* pointed out to *Pravasi* (a very popular and powerful magazine) that the actresses raised money to support various philanthropic activities benefiting society. For example, in the August 1901 issue, the editor of *Rangalaya* announced: 'There will be a Ramakrishna Festival in Kankurgachhi Yogodyana for five days. To support this function, there will be a play in the Classic Theatre on Sunday evening. The owner will donate all the proceeds to that cause.'13 A letter was published in the August 1911 issue of *Rangamancha* that read in part: 'The Minerva Theatre gave two benefit performances—one for Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi, and the other for the poor and sick famous poet Rajanikanta Sen. The superstar Tinkari and other actors and actresses did not receive any money for their performances' (73). Miss Josephine MacLeod wrote in a letter on 19 February 1923: 'Going in the evening to a benefit performance at the Star Theatre, for Ramakrishna Mission of Bhubaneswar, near Puri. The great Indian actress Tara coming out of retirement for it' (ibid.).



It is amazing to see the extent of Ramakrishna's influence in the Calcutta theatre world—he in-

fluenced not only Girish but also his actors and actresses. Binodini, who performed in the title role in *Chaitanya Lila* as well as in many other of Girish's plays, wrote in her autobiography: 'I don't care if the whole world looks down upon me, because I know that the pure and venerable Ramakrishna Paramahansa blessed me. His hopeful and nectar-like message "Hari guru, guru Hari"—Hari is the guru and the guru is Hari—still reassures me. When I am oppressed by unbearable pain and agony, his forgiving and gracious form appears in my heart and I hear his voice: "Say—Hari guru, guru Hari." I don't remember how many times he came to the theatre after *Chaitanya Lila*, but I saw his joyful face many times when he was seated in a box seat of the theatre.'14

The actor Amritlal Basu wrote: 'When the humble actress [Binodini] acted in the role of Chaitanya, the incarnation of God of Nadia, on the stage, Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar, another incarnation of God, watched that play and made the wretched stage like Vaikuntha [heaven]. We were blessed! The audience was blessed and so was the Mother Earth! The stage of the theatre became a holy place when Sri Ramakrishna watched through his divine eyes the *Chaitanya Lila*, which was enacted on it. To watch *Chaitanya Lila* is no longer considered to be enjoying an amusement, or being educated, or hearing kirtan; it is now considered to be witnessing a divine lila!'15

The actor Aparesh Mukhopadhyay wrote: 'When the theatre was first started, most people believed that those who act on stage are pariahs, or outcasts. Girish once wrote in a drama, "Who pays respect to a fallen courtesan?" But there was someone who paid respect, and he was none other than a monk who had completely renounced lust and gold! He put his palm on the head of a fallen actress and blessed her, saying, "May you be illumined"' (74–5).

Amar Datta, the editor of *Natya Mandir*, used Ramakrishna's picture on the cover of one of the magazine's issues. Within, he commented: 'We have printed the picture of Bhagavan Sri Rama-

krishna on the cover page of the current issue of *Natya Mandir*. Someone may ask why I have used the picture of the avatara Ramakrishna in a magazine that is full of pictures of actors and actresses. Here is my answer: According to the *Natya Mandir* this whole world is a theatre. All human beings act as actors and actresses on its stage every day. When the fallen ones forget to act in their proper roles according to the will of the Creator, the universal Director descends on the world stage. Thus a masterly Director was once born in a remote place of Bengal. He lived in the holy temple compound of Dakshineswar near Calcutta and attracted the learned and the illiterate, the rich and the poor. He imprinted in the hearts of seekers: This world is apparent and not absolutely real, and the goal of human life is to realize God. No one was deprived of his teaching—be that person a sadhu or a yogi, a sinner or a fallen woman. Incognito, he appeared as a poor and humble human being and mixed with all equally, out of pure love and compassion. The holy feet of this divine being—the saviour of the fallen—touched the national theatre of Bengal. Ordinary people despised the theatre, considering it to be an abode of immoral men and women, but heaven and hell were equal in the eyes of that great deliverer of sinners. So Ramakrishna—the teacher of humankind, the man-god, the compassionate one—came to the theatre. The touch of his holy feet sanctified the stage by wiping out all impurities, enhanced its dignity and beauty, and made it an attractive and wonderful place’ (75).

At that time, the magazines and papers connected with the Bengali stage gave tremendous importance to Ramakrishna’s visits to the theatre. Until Ramakrishna sanctified the theatre with his presence, most Bengalis considered houses of ill repute and theatres to be more or less the same. Ramakrishna’s patronage lifted the taboo. Going to see plays became socially acceptable.

The great reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought all his life for women’s liberation, but he dissociated himself from the theatre because he disapproved of women performing onstage. Rama-

krishna, however, approved of it. Basanta Kumar Ghosh wrote an article entitled ‘Bengali Women and the Theatre’ in *Natya Mandir*: ‘Being impressed with their artistic skill and performances, Bhagavan Ramakrishna blessed the courtesan actresses. It was a great achievement of an actress [Binodini], who brought a great soul to the theatre and sanctified it’ (75–6).

Those days are gone. Nowadays, upper-class men and women do not hesitate to become actors and actresses, and their family members are proud of them.

In the Hindu tradition, Shiva is sometimes known as Nataraja, the king of actors. Actors and actresses worship Nataraja by their performances, so their profession cannot be considered sinful. If Binodini had appealed to the prominent members of Calcutta society thus—‘I was born poor, in a red-light district. My mother was a courtesan, so I followed in her footsteps. I know that society hates our profession. God has endowed me with a talent for acting. Is it wrong if I want to change my profession and become an actress? Is it sinful to act in the role of Chaitanya and bring the audience to a spiritual realm?’—we don’t know what they would have answered. We leave Binodini’s question to the reader to answer. In this world there are thousands of Binodinis who are used and abused, neglected and persecuted, ill-treated and hated, and who are waiting for the right answer.

♦ ♦ ♦

Girish remarked: ‘*Chaitanya Lila* was my all in all. I received the grace of my guru through that play’ (77). Through that play the Bengali stage acquired its patron saint. Undoubtedly it was Girish who made Ramakrishna the presiding deity of the Bengali theatre. At that time, Girish was carried away by a great current of devotion. People in the theatre were overwhelmed by his gigantic personality and followed him spontaneously. Girish wholeheartedly believed that on the pretext of seeing a play, the avatara Ramakrishna had come to the theatre to deliver his message to actors and actresses. As manager and director of the theatre, Girish would

personally introduce to the Master those performers who had some devotion for him.

When a famous person comes to see a play, it is natural for the cast members to become inspired and act more enthusiastically than they normally would. But the actor's in Girish's plays were even more thrilled when Ramakrishna attended a performance. Previously they had been treated as untouchables, but Ramakrishna gave their morale a tremendous boost and helped them achieve recognition and respect in society. The performers would talk about Ramakrishna while dressing and putting on their make-up in the green room. After the play, they would assemble in Girish's room. One night, at a gathering at the Kohinoor Theatre, the actress Tarasundari said: 'With the type of life we have led, there is no deliverance for us.'

Girish: 'Don't say that, Tara. Don't you remember your aunt Bini [Binodini]? The Master was moved by her acting in the role of Chaitanya and blessed her, saying, "Mother, may you attain illumination."'

Abinash: 'Binodini is now a devotee and worships Gopala.'

Amritalal Basu also had a role in *Chaitanya Lila*, but he avoided Ramakrishna because he thought himself a sinner. Later Girish took him to the Master and changed his whole life, as is described in his memoirs (77-8).

After Ramakrishna's passing away, Girish became the Master's representative to the people of the theatre, as well as their guide. One day Ramchandra Datta and Manomohan Mitra, staunch devotees of the Master, went to visit Girish at his home. While smoking a hubble-bubble, Girish said: 'Brother Ram, the Master has possessed me. He is bringing all sorts of people to me. This wayward Raju, a nephew of Akshay Sen, is pestering me to take him to the Holy Mother and to the monastery.'

Ram: 'You are ordained to do that. But what good will it do if you take him? Don't you see his character?'

Girish: 'Yes, you are right. The Master left me


all the odd and wicked ones, the drunkards and prostitutes.'

Manomohan: 'That is the reason the Master attracted you. If you can captivate and change the most nefarious sinner, then others will be captivated easily.'

Girish: 'Even the courtesans are flocking to me. Before they appear onstage, they bow down to the Master's picture and then take the dust of my feet. If I do not allow them to touch my feet, they get offended and cannot act wholeheartedly. I am now in trouble!' (78-9).

The tradition of bowing down to Ramakrishna before going onstage still continues in Calcutta. The Master's picture is decorated with a garland every night before a performance, and someone waves lights and incense. It is astonishing that even now there are pictures of Ramakrishna in Calcutta theatres, in the green room, in the parlour, and in some actors' private dressing rooms. Even the technical workers of the theatre do not start their work before saluting Ramakrishna. Girish, a man who once called himself an atheist, is responsible for introducing this tradition.

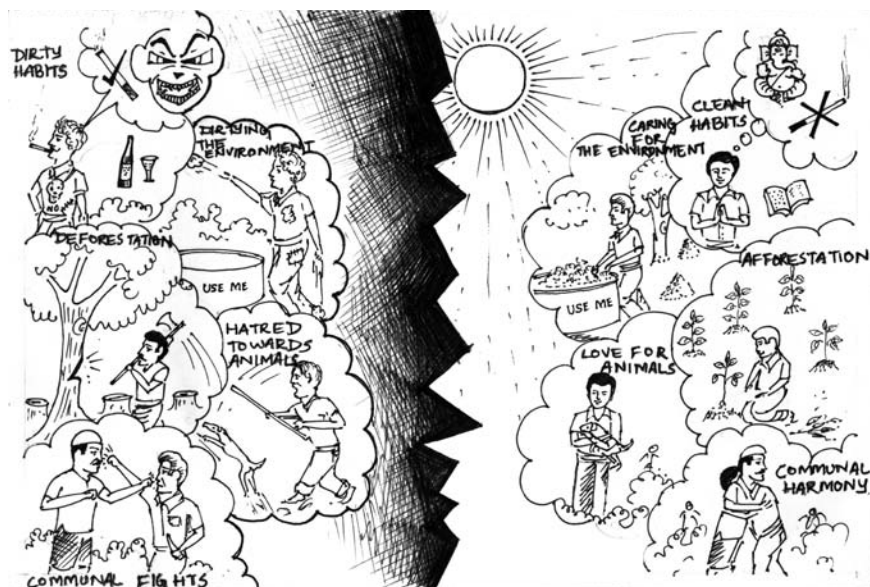
The following story illustrates how deeply Ramakrishna's teachings permeated the red-light districts of Calcutta: A courtesan died in a nursing home a few years ago. Some young people went to a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in Calcutta and informed him that they needed 26,000 rupees to cremate that woman. The swami learned from them who she was and found information about her will and the executor of her estate. He then talked to the executor, a prominent political leader in that area, and was informed that the woman had left everything to a hospital of the Ramakrishna Mission. The swami gave the money to those young people for her cremation and later went to her home with the police. From her house he recovered half a million rupees in cash, half a million rupees worth of jewellery, and a certificate of deposit worth one million rupees. The swami also found in her home some books about Ramakrishna as well as his picture.¹⁶

That unknown courtesan must have been a great soul! She left everything she had to Ramakrishna. Although her profession kept her body in the world, her devotion connected her mind with Ramakrishna—the man-God—the Saviour of the soul. 

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Impact of Knowledge and Ignorance



Lost in the dark ignorance of the world,
We, The children of God,

Cut trees fit,
For our own benefit;
Kill, Harm and Destroy,
The creatures of joy.

Arise, awake
Said the Lords,
For your own sake
Or face the odds.

Only Knowledge will lead you
To the better half of man;
With education true
You will truly become a better man.

Art by Manunath M; Script by Sagar G Nahar; Class Ten, Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya, Mysore



American Indians and Indians: Echoes across Time

Rajaram Suryanarayanan

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‘Columbus discovered America’ is a schoolhouse truth drummed into the brains of schoolchildren—but what about the ‘Americans’ that were living in America already, who were ‘discovered’ by him? Columbus believed that he had actually landed in India and took the people he saw there to be Indians. Thus came the terms ‘American Indian’ and ‘Red Indian’, by which the native inhabitants of the American continent came to be known.

It is believed that the Native Americans have been living in the continents of North and South America from at least as early as 30,000 years ago. Only in the sixteenth century did white Europeans start to migrate to the newly discovered land, bringing with them lots of desires and expectations. When they set their foot on American soil, they were met by the Native Americans, and both sides looked upon the other with a puzzled and suspicious

air. Soon conflicts started breaking out between them. There were enough reasons for this.

What, one may ask, is so interesting about these peoples or tribes who are now commonly called the ‘American Indians’? One answer—the one I have found—is *wisdom*. Yes, these peoples were real kings of wisdom, and I was amazed to find many striking similarities between their wisdom and the wisdom of the ‘Indian Indians’—that is, the ancient Hindus.

I was much surprised to see that the essence of their wisdom was very much akin to that which is found in the Upanishads and Vedas, and which has been nurtured by Hinduism through the ages.

In this article I have tried to share some of my findings of correlations between the insights of the American Indians and the timeless truths expressed in the Vedas and Upanishads and often reiterated by Swami Vivekananda.

The background of the page features a large, faint image of silhouettes of people in various prayer poses. On the left, a person stands with arms raised. On the right, several people are in a body of water, some with hands in a prayer position above their heads. The overall tone is spiritual and serene.

Prayers for Well-being, Peace, and Strength

Shanti mantras or prayers for peace form an integral part of Hindu religious activity. Vedic chanting includes these prayers, which seek divine guidance and peace for all beings, starting from one's own self. This well-known shanti mantra from the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* begins with the words *Om yaśchandasāṁṛṣabho viśvarūpaḥ*. The Native American prayer, translated by Lakota Sioux Chief Yellow Lark, expresses many of the same ideas.

Om. May He, the Lord of all, pre-eminent among the Vedas and superior to the nectar contained in them, bless me with wisdom. May I be adorned with the knowledge of Brahman that leads to immortality. May my body become strong and vigorous (to practise meditation). May my tongue always utter delightful words. May I hear much with my ears. You are the scabbard of Brahman covered by worldly wisdom. May I never forget all that I have learnt.

Om, peace, peace, peace!

O Great Spirit, Whose voice I hear in the winds, and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me—I am small and weak, I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

Idea of Universal Happiness and Harmony

Here is another instance of the striking similarity seen between Indians and American Indians in their idea of universal happiness, health, harmony, and well-being. Both peoples understand well that individual happiness depends solely on the collective happiness of all living beings.

Om. Auspiciousness (svasti) be unto all; peace be unto all; fullness be unto all; prosperity be unto all.

May all be happy, may all be free from disease, may all see what is good, may none suffer from sorrow.

May the Warm Winds of Heaven blow softly upon your house. May the Great Spirit bless all who enter there. May your moccasins make happy tracks in many snows, and may the rainbow always touch your shoulder.

—Cherokee Prayer Blessing



Chief Dan George (1899–1981) was a modern Native American, a gifted actor and chief of the Tsleil-waututh Nation in Burrard Inlet, British Columbia. He is well-known for his words of courage and wisdom.

May the stars carry your sadness away,

May the flowers fill your heart with beauty,

May hope forever wipe away your tears,

And, above all, may silence make you strong.

—Chief Dan George

Secret of Work

If you set to work in right earnest, then you are sure to be successful. Whoever works at a thing heart and soul not only achieves success in it, but through his absorption in that he also realizes the supreme Truth—Brahman.

—Swami Vivekananda

Friend do it this way—that is, whatever you do in life, do the very best you can with both your heart and mind. And if you do it that way, the Power of the Universe will come to your assistance, if your heart and mind are in Unity.

—Lakota Instructions for Living

Die Like a Hero

Fear, particularly of death, has to be conquered. See how American Indians tried to live a detached life, welcoming death like true heroes:

How few have dared to worship Death or Kali! Let us worship Death! Let us embrace the Terrible, because it is terrible, not asking that it be toned down. Let us take misery for misery's own sake!

—Swami Vivekananda

When it comes your time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. Sing your death song and die like a hero going home. —Chief Tecumseh (Crouching Tiger)

All Things Move in a Circle

Nature recycles; Not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense. Every soul journeys between birth and death.

Everything moves in a circle; a straight line, infinitely produced, becomes a circle. If that is the case, there cannot be eternal degeneration for any soul. It cannot be. Everything must complete the circle, and come back to its source.

—Swami Vivekananda

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. ... The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.

—Black Elk

Black Elk (1863–1950) was a famous Wichasha Wakan (Medicine Man or Holy Man) of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux). He served as a spiritual leader among his people, seeing no contradiction in embracing what he found valid in both his tribal traditions and those of Christianity.

Nature Worship

The ancient Hindus cared for their environment. Whatever was around them—plants, animals, the five elements of nature, and so on were just extensions of their own self. It was likewise for the American Indians. They honoured them and lived in balance and harmony along with them.

Om. May there be peace in heaven; may there be peace in the sky; may there be peace on earth; may there be peace in the waters. May the trees and plants be full of peace. May the gods be peaceful. May there be peace in Brahman; may there be peace in all. May the peace be peaceful. May that peace enter into our deepest being.

Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!

Honour the sacred.

Honour the Earth, our Mother.

Honour the Elders.

Honour all with whom we share the Earth—

Four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged ones,

Swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock

People

Walk in balance and beauty.

—Native American Elder

Sacred Land of Our People

Whosoever stands on this sacred land, whether alien or a child of the soil, feels himself surrounded—unless his soul is degraded to the level of brute animals—by the living thoughts of the earth's best and purest sons, who have been working to raise the animal to the divine through centuries, whose beginning history fails to trace. The very air is full of the pulsations of spirituality. This land is sacred to philosophy, to ethics and spirituality, to all that tends to give a respite to man in his incessant struggle for the preservation of the animal, to all training that makes man throw off the garment of brutality and stand revealed as the spirit immortal, the birthless, the deathless, the ever-blessed.

—Swami Vivekananda

Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people, and the very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. Our departed braves, fond mothers, glad, happy hearted maidens, and even the little children who lived here and rejoiced here for a brief season will love these somber solitudes, and at eventide they greet shadowy returning spirits.

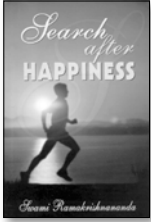
—Chief Seattle

Chief Seattle (also Sealth, Seathl or See-ahth, c. 1786–1866) was a leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American tribes in what is now the state of Washington. A prominent figure among his people, he became a convert to Roman Catholicism and pursued a path of accommodation to European settlers.

We have examined just a few samples of the eternal wisdom that permeated the lives of Native Americans. We shall surely find more marvels as we continue digging. Let us welcome noble thoughts that come to us from every side. ☯

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



Search after Happiness Swami Ramakrishnananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai
600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com.
2006. iv + 195 pp. Rs 32.

The book under review is a revised edition of two notable publications of Sri Ramakrishna Math, *The Message of Eternal Wisdom* and *The Ancient Quest*, bringing together the plenary wisdom of Swami Ramakrishnananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. It contains fourteen lectures of the eminent swami delivered between 1893 and 1911, one of which lends its title to the book.

The search for happiness begins from birth. Strangely, a higher standard of living is accompanied by a steady erosion of peace and happiness. This is a global phenomenon.

The search for happiness should begin with the basics: What constitutes life, existence, death, body, mind and soul, maya, consciousness, and reality? Without this foundational understanding, a search for happiness in the psychophysical plane becomes a futile exercise. Swami Ramakrishnananda addresses all these issues; his convincing presentation of these concepts will infuse confidence in the distressed. He explains:

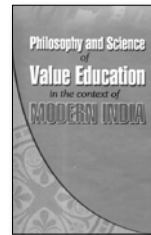
Our present life is 'only a tiny chapter in a big volume whose beginning as well as end is the one eternal God'. We are only dwellers in the body and should quit it when it becomes uninhabitable. Wants number in the millions; one cannot satisfy all of them. The 'flame of desire ... increases with enjoyment'. If we have many wants, we are never happy. We need to realize that we are masters of and not slaves to desire. The self is not the body but exists everywhere in the body; it is also distinct from the emotions that bathe the body and mind. The 'real man' is infinite, without hunger, thirst, or desires. Religion is necessary 'for the foolish as well as the wise'. Also, multiple religious faiths are necessary and inevitable.

The book covers topics like 'Who am I', 'Mind

and Maya', 'The Necessity of Religion', and 'Is a Belief in Transmigration Consistent with Reasoning', and appropriately concludes with a focus on the divine life of Sri Ramakrishna and the 'universal doctrine' he unfolded. Despite an orthodox upbringing, Sri Ramakrishna was not a 'religious aristocrat'. He demonstrated how orthodoxy must blend with liberalism and how Truth is not the monopoly of any person or nation.

The search for happiness is not an endless journey if the path unveiled by the Great Master and presented by Swami Ramakrishnananda is adopted. This moderately priced book will be valuable to young and old.

P S Sundaram
Mumbai



Philosophy and Science of Value Education in the Context of Modern India

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture,
Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail:
rmic@vsnl.com. 2006. x + 332 pp. Rs 50.

If by 'education' is meant 'character-building' and 'man-making', then value education is the crying need of the hour. Value education is needed not only for students in various educational institutions but also for all human beings in all stages and walks of life. How to do it constitutes the theme of this book, which contains thoughtful addresses delivered by twenty dignitaries, including educationists, scientists, media persons, monks, and philosophers, at a national seminar held at the Institute of Culture.

The seminar comprised six academic sessions with fourteen papers presented, discussions on twelve of those papers, two panel discussions, and inaugural and valedictory sessions, held over the course of two days in January 2005. In his address of benediction, Swami Ranganathananda, fourteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order, says: 'The problem for India in the modern age is the assimilation of the forces released by science, technology, and democracy, which

are being grafted on to her traditional tree. The success of this experiment depends upon two factors: one, the vitality of the spiritual sap running in the tree, and two, its hospitality to the new forces contained in the grafts' (8).

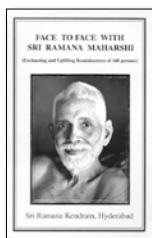
In his inaugural speech Prof. Kireet Joshi points out that yoga is a valid means for realization of values. Dr Saibal Gupta draws our attention to the *daivi sampad*, a detailed catalogue of universal values that appears in the Bhagavadgita. He also narrates how Niels Bohr, the famous physicist, had deep interest in some ideas of the Upanishads, an interest that was shared by Erwin Schrödinger. The Indian value system is based on the experience of the unity of existence. The doctrines of innate human divinity and oneness of existence, according to Swami Atmapiyananada, have the potential for ushering in a new world order. According to Prof. J S Rajput, the term 'value education' implies valuable education, education through which humans are enlightened. An education based on the Upanishads, Gita, and yoga is valuable because it enlightens.

The topics covered in the volume range from the plight of family values in modern times, to scientific, genetic, and political aspects of value education, to value-based leadership and the role of the media. Unfortunately, a number of careless typographical errors litter the pages of the book; more careful proof-reading would improve a second edition.

Every participant has contributed to the literary and knowledge content of the book. It is recommended especially to our political leaders as a wide-ranging treatment of a vitally important subject.

Dr S C Goswami

Former Reader in Chemistry
Dayal Singh College, New Delhi



**Face to Face with
Sri Ramana Maharshi**
Comp. and ed.
Prof. Laxmi Narain

Sri Ramana Kendram, 2-2-1109, Batkammakunta Sivam Road, Hyderabad 500 013. Distributed by Motilal Banarsidass, 41 UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 062. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2005. xviii + 401 pp. Rs 200.

Sri Ramana Maharshi would ask his followers to ask themselves the question, 'Who am I?' This would begin an exalted spiritual endeavour, the fulfilment of which could be found in Ramana's supra-

sensuous presence itself. He was the ambrosia of spiritual consciousness personified in human form, a glimpse of which would be caught by every single visitor who was fortunate to approach him. As such, to be face to face with Sri Ramana Maharshi, as one visitor remarked, was to be face to face with God's gracious power working in his person.

A significant feature of this book is that the Maharshi is presented not as a bygone entity but as a living source of divine bliss. Each of the one hundred sixty accounts presented here bears testimony to this fact. What his admirers see in him are the wonderful traits of a true *sthitaprajna* and *jivanmukta*, as described in the Hindu scriptures. Though his easy accessibility, utterly normal behaviour, perfect sense of equality, overflowing compassion, and undisturbed silence are captivating, it is his loving but penetrating look that shakes the depths of one's heart and reveals answers to countless troubling questions. Realization is no longer a distant dream, but an immediate reality, the flow of which can be felt in the person of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The intimate accounts given in this book are invaluable, for they depict Ramana as a complete man, in all dimensions and forms. While some focus on his spiritual achievements, many have recounted the deep impressions his human personality left on them. These recollections form a beautiful blending of Ramana's life, teachings, and influence on people from diverse strata of society. While his close devotees look upon Ramana as an incarnation of God, others—like his many non-Indian admirers—see in him the embodiment of the spiritual treasure of India. It is an enchanting as well as uplifting experience to meditate on the Bhagavan as he has been envisioned by disciples and devotees.

These accounts belong to a vast span of time (1879–1950); hence we can trace the gradual manifestation of Ramana's inner spiritual potential. But all the writers agree, based on their own experiences, that an intense power to transform others was latent in him. Every one of them, in his presence, found an inexpressible change taking place in their minds and personalities. In Bhagavan's presence, again, many would find a kind of overwhelming power engulfing their limited being. But there was no cause for fear or anxiety, as Ramana would radiate nothing but silent waves of peace, quietude, and fearlessness around him.

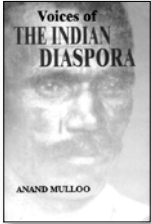
Our thanks go to Prof. Laxmi Narain of Ramana Kendram for compiling this large collection of remi-

niscences culled from numerous sources. It is like a bouquet of beautiful flowers offered at Ramana's feet. A brief life-sketch of the sage, beautiful photos, a detailed bibliography, a brief description of all contributors, a list of accolades showered on Ramana, and an extensive index—all these have added to the usefulness of this book.

Swami Vireshananda

Editor, *Viveka Prabha*

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore



Voices of the Indian Diaspora

Anand Mulloo

Motilal Banarsidass. 2007. 393 pp.
Rs 395.

I felt privileged and inspired to read *Voices of The Indian Diaspora*; as a person of Indian origin myself, I found it personally relevant. More importantly, it reminds us of the toils and struggles of our forebears, and that in those times of trial, never was *jjyoti*—the spiritual light—sacrificed. Herein lies the book's empowering message. The book also made me aware of my own ignorance about the status and struggles of PIOs and NRIs—persons of Indian origin and non-resident Indians—across the globe.

V S Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* was my first contact with Indian literature. The two themes that stood out for me, as a class nine student, were Mr Biswas's love of tea and his ambition to own a house, yet having neither the outer nor inner means to acquire one. The context is different, but the issues that assailed Mr Biswas are common to Indians everywhere. Anand Mulloo attributes some of these issues to deficits in Indian political leadership, and identifies the challenge of maintaining unity in the face of diversity and forces of disunity through effective leadership.

Voices of The Indian Diaspora is a spiritual journey, retracing the roots of our forebears. It affirms and reaffirms our sense of identity and belonging—a sense often lost by PIOs.

Mulloo uses the terms 'Old India' and 'New India', which brings to mind an image of the unfurling and furling of the tentacles of the octopus that is Bharata. For decades they remained furled, and Bharata immune to the plight of its children living away from her; she is only just beginning to unfurl her tentacles to—I hope—reach out and embrace her children to her bosom. The GOPIO (Global Organization of Peo-

ple of Indian Origin) in all that it has achieved thus far, is one means of access to Bharata.

Historically, PIOs and NRIs have been both victims and victors politically, socially, economically, and culturally. With minimal to no support from or connections to Mother India, their spiritual and cultural values served as their mainstay.

Unfortunately, *Voices of the Indian Diaspora* contains occasional typographical errors throughout. A number of paragraph-length quotations are given in French without any English translation, proving meaningless to readers who do not know French. The actual 'voices' of the Indian Diaspora span most continents and convey an initial foundation of knowledge. However, Mauritius is given the greatest prominence in the ensuing analysis and reflections. The cover illustration is given a fleeting mention in the course of narration, but an explanation and acknowledgement provided at the beginning would enhance the reader's appreciation and understanding.

The author has researched his subject extensively. I found myself fully identifying with the cross-cultural life experiences of PIOs and NRIs through the course of history, as encapsulated in the book, and grappling with a myriad of feelings on reading the explicit descriptions of the lives of our forebears who left the motherland, either voluntarily or through compulsion.

Rita Ramsaran

Bialik College, Melbourne

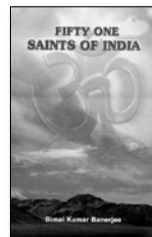
BOOKS RECEIVED



Holy Vrindaban

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama,
Vrindaban, Dist. Mathura, UP 281 121;
E-mail: rkmsvrnd@sancharnet.in. 2008.
47 pp. Rs 25.

A commemorative booklet to mark one hundred years of medical, socio-economic, and spiritual service of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban.



Fifty One Saints of India

Bimal Kumar Banerjee

AK-7, Sector II, Salt Lake, Kolkata
700 091. 2007. x + 192 pp. Rs 150.

Brief pen-portraits of such diverse Indian saints as Buddha, Mahavira, the Nayanmars, Gorakhnath, Ramakrishna, and Dhananjaydas Babaji.

REPORTS

News from Branch Centres

The new Vivekananda Vidya Vihar or Centre for Excellence through Education at **Ramakrishna Mission, Sitanagaram** (Vijayawada), was inaugurated on 14 February 2008 by Srimat Swami Smananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Besides housing both a Telugu-medium high school and an English-medium school, the centre will also serve as a hub for various service activities benefiting rural poor and youth. As part of the inauguration, several cultural programmes and a parents' convention were conducted.



Newly constructed Vivekananda Vidya Vihar or Centre for Excellence through Education at Sitanagar (Vijaywada)

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad, organized a medical camp, discourses, and an exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda at Triveni Sangam on the occasion of Magh Mela, from 20 January to 21 February. About 16,000 people were treated at the medical camp, and nearly 80,000 people attended the exhibition.

Sri Ashwini Kumar Chaubey, Minister for Urban Development, Bihar, inaugurated an additional operation theatre at the Sarada Netralaya of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna**, on 16 February.



Fruit tree saplings for farmers in rural areas of Inanda and Nonoti, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

As part of its ongoing agricultural activities, the **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban**, donated over one thousand fruit tree saplings (mango, litchi, orange, lemon, avocado, pear, and banana) to community and individual farmers in the rural areas of Inanda and Nonoti, KwaZulu-Natal over the last three months of 2007.

Achievements

Soumya Subra Bhadury, Sandipan Chakraborty and Upamanyu Sengupta, students of the college at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, won the first, fourth, and fifth prizes respectively in the All-India Elocution Competition on Swami Vivekananda, held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, in December 2007. Rudra Sekhar Basu, a 2nd-year BA student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Saradapitha, Belur**, secured the second position in the undergraduate group.

Arnab Rudra, a 1st-year BSc Physics (Honours) student of **Vidyamandira, Belur**, was awarded the Jagadish Bose National Science Talent Scholarship, 2007, and Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana National Science Fellowship, 2007.

Nyato Doji, Tania Uli, Nanjal Dulom, Kembi Basar, and Baanu Loya, students of **Ramakrishna Mission School, Aalo**, were each awarded a gold medal for their case studies on a biodiversity project presented in the 15th National Science Congress held at Bharatiya Vidya Pratishthan, Pune, from 27 to 31 December.

Sarjick Bakshi, Satrajit Das, Laksabir Deb-nath, Saptarshi Saha, and Annek Roy Choudhury, class-11 students of **Ramakrishna Mission School, Viveknagar**, were awarded the Jagadish Bose National Science Talent Search Junior Scholarship, 2007. Chitradeep Gupta, a class-10 student of the same school, was the only student from the entire north-eastern region of India to be selected for the 2008 International Mathematical Olympiad Training Camp, which prepares students for the International Mathematical Olympiad.

National Youth Day Celebrations

The following centres celebrated National Youth Day on 12 January: **Baghbazar**: speeches, question-answer session, cultural competitions, and music; **Delhi**: cultural competitions, music, and public meeting addressed by Sri Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of State for Commerce; **Jayrambati**: procession and cultural competitions; **Porbandar**: cultural competitions; **Shyamla Tal**: speeches and cultural competitions.

Relief

Centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission conducted relief in the month of February as follows:

Winter Relief · A total number of 19,284 blankets were distributed to people affected by the severity of winter through the following centres: Almora: 302; Asansol: 500; Baghbazar: 210; Bankura: 987; Baranagar Mission: 800; Barasat: 500; Belgharia: 520; Chapra: 370; Cooch Behar: 336; Deoghar: 2,000; Dinajpur (Bangladesh): 257; Garbeta: 50; Guwahati: 250; Jayrambati: 1,057; Kamarpukur: 1,300; Kanpur: 231; Katihar: 400; Koalpara (Jayrambati): 2,748; Limbdi: 260; Medi-

nipur: 300; Puri Math: 1,000; Purulia: 1,500; Rahara: 106; Rajkot: 47; Ranchi Sanatorium: 529; Sikra Kulingram: 600; Taki: 673; Tamluk: 1,000; Varanasi Home of Service: 451. Distribution of winter garments: Baranagar Mission: 125 chadars and 415 sweaters; Rajkot: 63 sweaters; Ranchi Sanatorium: 25 woollen chadars.

Flood Relief · Belgharia centre distributed 1,900 biscuit packets, 520 dhotis, 233 shirts, and 532 frocks to 765 flood-affected persons in East Medinipur district.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to persons of nearby areas: Baranagar Mission: 298 saris, 211 dhotis, 15 churidars, 87 pants and shirts, and 36 bags; Dinajpur (Bangladesh): 498 saris, 475 dhotis, and 80 other garments; Garbeta: 70 dhotis; Jayrambati: 1,520 saris; Katihar: food packets to 340 families, 30 cycles, and 400 books and stationery to students; Medinipur: 50 saris and 20 dhotis; Rahara: 174 saris, 51 dhotis, 120 mosquito nets, 76 wrappers, 26 litres of coconut oil, and 309 food packets; Taki: 275 saris and 25 dhotis. Also, 30 tube wells were sunk by Katihar centre in nearby villages.

Economic Rehabilitation · The following two centres distributed various items to people under a self-employment programme: Katihar: 4 sewing machines and 15 rickshaws; Tamluk: 16 sewing machines, 16 fishing nets, and 7 rickshaws. ☞



Helping combat a bitter winter; blanket distribution, Home of Service, Varanasi